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FLOOD-TIDE

Sunday Evenings in a City Pulpit

BY THE

REV. G. H. MORRISON, M.A.

GLASGOW

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

‘A breath from the Infinite blows through us. We are linked to the larger life of God. A new sense of the infinite worth of being leaps up in flood-tide within our hearts.’

These brief addresses, prepared from week to week after the more severe preparations for the forenoon diet of worship were got through, are offered as a very humble contribution towards solving the problem of the second service. They have, I think, appealed to a somewhat wider and more varied audience than is commonly gathered in an evening congregation. And from not a few of those quiet acknowledgments, which are among the most precious seals of ministry, I trust they have been useful in the highest sense.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
RELIGIOUS USES OF MEMORY	1
Remember the former things of old: I am God, and there is none like me.—Isa. xlvi. 9.	
 THE PROPORTIONS OF LIFE	12
The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.— Rev. xxi. 16.	
 SINCERITY	22
Thou desirest truth in the inward parts.—Ps. li. 6.	
 THE FRIVOLOUS SPIRIT	34
But they made light of it.—Matt. xxiii. 5.	
 TO THE DISHEARTENED	43
Why art thou cast down, O my soul?—Ps. xlii. 5.	
 VISION AND DUTY	53
And Samuel opened the doors of the house of the Lord.— 1 Sam. iii. 15.	

	PAGE
UNSEEN ENVIRONMENT	64
Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see.—2 Kings vi. 17.	
THE UNREAPED CORNER	73
And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field.—Lev. xix. 9.	
THE REFUSALS OF CHRIST , , , ,	82
LOVE'S WASTEFULNESS	92
To what purpose is this waste?—Matt. xxvi. 8.	
REVERENCE	103
And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.—Rev. i. 17.	
WORK AND PLAY	115
And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.—Zech. viii. 5.	
THE LAND OF HILLS AND VALLEYS	126
But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys.—Deut. xi. 11.	

CONTENTS

ix

	PAGE
UNWARRANTABLE INTERFERENCES	136
If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on Him.— John xi. 48.	
THE CHOKED WELLS	148
And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father.—Gen. xxvi. 18.	
THE CONTRADICTIONS OF LIFE	159
We went through fire and through water, but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.—Ps. lxvi. 12.	
THE MESSAGE OF THE RAINBOW	170
I do set my bow in the cloud.—Gen. ix. 13.	
RIGHT AND WRONG USES OF OUR PAST	179
Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee.—Deut. viii. 2.	
Forgetting those things which are behind.—Phil. iii. 13.	
THE LOVE OF LIFE	191
Yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.—Job ii. 4.	

	PAGE
THE LONELINESS OF SIN	200
He went immediately out : and it was night.—John xiii. 30.	
SOME FEATURES OF CHRIST'S WORKING	209
My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.—John v. 17.	
THE DAY OF THE EAST WIND	220
He stayeth His rough wind in the day of the east wind.— Isa. xxvii. 8.	
FOREWARNED, FOREARMED	230
We are not ignorant of his devices.—2 Cor. ii. 11.	
THE MINUTE PHILOSOPHER	241
Seest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not.— Jer. xlvi. 5.	
THE MINISTRY OF SURPRISE	252
Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness.— Ps. xxi. 3.	
THE WANDERING BIRD	262
As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place.—Prov. xxvii. 8.	

CONTENTS

xi

	PAGE
THE LARGER HOSPITALITY	271
Be not forgetful to entertain strangers ; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.—Heb. xiii. 2.	
CREATION'S WITNESS TO THE YOUTH OF JESUS	282
Thou hast the dew of thy youth.—Ps. cx. 9.	

RELIGIOUS USES OF MEMORY

Remember the former things of old : I am God, and there
is none like me.—Isa. xlvi. 9.

OF all the powers that God has given us, none is more wonderful than memory. There is a mystery in thought that leaps out to its object and annihilates space. There is a mystery in hope that rises unconquerable in the heart. Imagination is mysterious : so are desire and fear. But of all the powers God has given us, none is more wonderful than memory.

For what is memory? It is a twofold power. It is the power that gathers in the past, and crowds into some secret cabinet here the twice ten thousand things that we have learned. And then it is the power that out of that crowded storehouse brings the things forth again, calls them to mind. Some languages have different words for these two acts. We have but one. And not

2 RELIGIOUS USES OF MEMORY

a little confusion has arisen from our using the one word for both.

A man says, I have a bad memory. He means that his power of recollecting is at fault. Another says, I have a splendid memory. He means that at his beck and call the things he wants come leaping into mind. In *that* sense some memories are good and some are bad. But in the other sense, the probability is that every memory is perfect. It is no proof I have forgotten a thing because I cannot recollect it now. It may come back to me to-night, to-morrow. It may come back to me when I am dying. And so strange are these revivings of the past, so unaccountably do things arise that we were sure we had forgotten these ten years: so true and full is the awful resurrection of dead days in the brain of a delirious or of a drowning man, that thinkers have conjectured we forget nothing.

Now I will venture to assert that there is no religion which lays such an emphasis on memory as Christianity. It is the glory of Jesus that He pressed all powers into His service. Thought, hope, imagination, fear—He used them all. But He exalted memory in religious service as it had

never been exalted by another teacher. And He recognised its moral character as it had never been recognised before.

What do we call Christ's sayings? We call them memorable words. And memorable words are not merely words that we remember: they are words so chosen, and so couched and set, that they make an instant impression on the memory. The words of countless writers I forget. I read them, catch a glimpse of them, and they are gone. But the words of Jesus are like barbed arrows. The words of Jesus are like the seal upon the wax. Once stamped with these, and memory will bear them to the end. Christ recognised the character of memory in making His words so memorable as that.

And when we sit at the Lord's Supper, what do we hear? 'This do in remembrance of me.' There at the Holy Table: there at the very centre of the Gospel: there in the richest hour of feast and fellowship, the dominant note is memory. It is not hope, though I am hopeful there. It is not knowledge. It is not even faith, though I believe—help Thou mine unbelief! It is, 'This do in remembrance of me.' It sets a crown

4 RELIGIOUS USES OF MEMORY

upon the head of memory, that supper. It shows what Christ expected of it. It is more than a gift, more than an aptitude. It is a moral power. It is a religious force.

Did you ever think what a daring thing it was of Christ and Christianity to lay such an emphasis on memory? It is with the past that memory deals; and to enlist the memory in His service meant simply that Christ was not afraid to face the past. Any false prophet could lay the stress on hope. It is so easy to speak of an untrodden future. It is the glory of Christianity that it has a message for your past: ‘Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.’ Only Christ could dare to exalt memory so. And it took Calvary, and pardon to the uttermost, and peace with God, to do it.

Now I wish to-night to touch on three great offices of memory in the higher life. And the first of these is this: It is memory which helps us to consecrate the world.

In one of the noblest passages he ever wrote, John Ruskin tells us how once he stood at sunset, in the spring-time, among the pine forests of the

Jura. It was a scene of incomparable beauty, where the long line of hills was like the first utterance of those mighty mountain symphonies, soon to be more loudly lifted and wildly broken along the battlements of the Alps. The clear green streams wandered in quietness under the undisturbed pines. ‘And there was such a company of joyful flowers,’ he says, ‘as I know not the like of among all the blessings of the earth.’ And then he asked himself, Why does this scene impress me so? And it flashed on him—and no man was more skilled and subtle in such analyses—that the deepest source of its impressiveness was memory. ‘These ever-springing flowers,’ he says, ‘and ever-flowing streams had been dyed by the deep colours of human endurance, valour, and virtue. And the crests of the hills that rose against the evening sky received a deeper worship, because their shadows fell on iron walls where men had fought, and four-square keeps where men had died, for liberty.’ It was a world of beauty; but it took memory to consecrate the world.

And with us too, in our humbler way, it is the same. The hallowing of earth is memory’s secret.

6 RELIGIOUS USES OF MEMORY

Mountain and moor and street and cottage are more than beautified, they are blessed, in memory. And to live in a blessed earth is a right blessed thing. I fancy there are many streams as fair as Doune, and many a ruined kirk finer than Alloway, but it is Doune and Alloway the thousands journey to, because of the great heart that sung and suffered there. And there are villages sweeter than Stratford, and parks more ancient than the parks of Charlote, but the memories of Shakespeare that cluster there have consecrated these spots for ever. And Nazareth? yes, Nazareth is always beautiful: and the hills would have been as green to-day if Joseph and Mary had never lived and loved. But what a richness and what a glory falls on Nazareth through the memory of Jesus Christ! I knew a woman who had been reared amid the bleak moors of Caithness: and she went into service and spent the summers by Loch Lomond. And all the islands and all the birch-clad hills, and all the lights and shadows on the loch, meant little to her: it was the moors that were beautiful to her, for in the moors were the memories of home.

But there is another office of memory in the

higher life. It is an aid to charity. It helps us to understand our friend.

Some one has said—I think it is Emerson—that to be great is to be misunderstood. If that be so, we are all greater than we think, for more or less we are all misunderstood. Do you think for a moment you are to yourself what yourself seems to me? In the shallowest heart there is a deep that defies utterance. There is a meaning and a movement here, that neither tongue nor eye can ever tell. Thought, passion, dream, are far too swift and subtle ever to be expressed. We grope and stumble to explain ourselves. We speak and do, and it is all we can do. But the true man is greater than his speech. And the true man is greater than his deed. He stands, like his risen Lord, within the veil.

And has God given us no line to sound these depths? no key to unlock these secret places? We have got two from God. And the one is sympathy, that opens another's heart when he is here. And the other is memory, that opens another's character when he is gone.

It has been said our friends are never ours till we have lost them. It is a strained expression of

8 RELIGIOUS USES OF MEMORY

this certain truth, that of all lights, there is none clearer than the light of memory. I cannot judge a man while he is here. He is too near, he looms too large on me. I magnify, distort, exaggerate. I envy him, although he is my friend. I grudge him his triumph in my heart while I congratulate him. Or it may be I love him far too well to be impartial. But at the grave, passions and prejudices go. And in the light of memory these mists are fled. I can be jealous in hope, jealous in love, jealous in life, but not in death. I can be cross and fretful with my child while he is here, but I am never fretful at my child when he is gone. So memory redresses things: helps me to see, and know, and understand: lets me do justice to the great, and to the men and women I knew and wronged. And what doth thy God require of thee, O man, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.

Did you ever regard it as a signal mercy that it is in the light of memory we have to do with Christ? Perhaps you have thought it would be an easier thing to be a Christian if Jesus Christ were here. If only you heard His footfall on the street, and had the touch of His hand upon your

brow, it would be easier to be better than it is. O God be thanked that we are spared this trial. If I do not know my friend till he is gone, would I have seen the Saviour in a Nazarene? It is an untold blessing that there have been nineteen centuries to lay asleep the passion and the tumult that might have filled my heart and steeled me, had I been born and bred with Christ in Nazareth. I can look back now. I can appreciate in the light of memory. I can go to my room and close the door, and alone with God and the Spirit of remembrance, I can accept and close with Christ to-night.

I shall mention but one other office of memory in the higher life. It helps us to understand ourselves. Do you remember what our Laureate sang? 'Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control; these three alone lead life to sovereign power.' And we are all struggling after self-control. And every manful struggle aids self-reverence. But only faith and prayer and memory will bring self-knowledge. Faith brings it, for it brings me near to Christ. Prayer brings it, for it shows me what I lack. And memory brings it too.

10 RELIGIOUS USES OF MEMORY

What kind of things do you remember best? that is the question. The kind of thing that you remember best, is no bad token of the kind of heart you have. Do you remember melodies and music? Memory betrays the musician there. Do you remember sunsets on the sea, and the lights and shadows of the winter hills? Ah, I have got the secret of a poet's heart. Do you remember slights and petty insults, and every unkindly word about a brother? Out on thee, shallow heart! Do you remember God, and all God's wonderful and wise compassion? Come, friend of David and of Paul, we have met with a man and with a Christian now. You never thought the memory and the heart were so akin? But even a child, learning a task by memory, says, I have got it by heart now, mother. And a little child shall lead them.

A word, and I am done. As life advances, memory grows richer. In youth we hope much and remember little. In age it is memory that plays the larger part. Can it be, then, that in the hour of death, the memory of the past is blotted out? It is impossible. It is no power extraneous to myself. It is a part of this immortal *me*. And

when I wake, freed from this hampering body, enlarged and glorified in every faculty, my memory must share in the full tides of life. My thought will flash. My imagination will glow. My hope will be radiant and steady as a star. And my memory yonder, sharing in the awaking of this strange manhood that here is but asleep, will in one flash, and yet for ever, see all my past, and see it as it was. How that can be in heaven, I hardly know. How the full memory of my sin and shame can still be mine, and I with Christ, I cannot tell. I only know, that seeing all the past shaded and filled with the pardon and the love of God, I shall be readier to cast my crown down at His feet. And if I live and die careless, Christless, Godless, I only know that an awakened memory shall be the awfulest torture of my hell. Happy that we can remember Calvary to-night ! Happy that there is still room within the grace of Jesus to shield us from the curse of an awakened and avenging memory

THE PROPORTIONS OF LIFE

The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.¹

Rev. xxi. 16.

AT first glance this figure seems absurd. We could understand a city being equal in its length and breadth. Many fine cities of the world have been built in an almost perfect square. But this city that John saw was equal, not only in its length and breadth, but in its height as well. And it is almost impossible to picture that. Are we to carry its walls up to an infinite height? or sink its foundations to an incredible depth? Whichever way we take it, there is difficulty. And a great French sceptic, who wrote with an exquisite beauty that I wish some of the defenders of the Kingdom could attain, has opened the vials of his scorn upon this prison-house that John set up and called the New Jerusalem.

¹ For the suggestion of the text I am indebted to a sermon by Phillips Brooks.

But perhaps, after all, John had the right of it. Perhaps after all, inspired by God, he saw far deeper than any witty Frenchman. For John was a prophet, and in his struggling to the birth with mighty truths, he had to make free with language now and then. Our figures and pictures are so largely inadequate to body out the great realities. And I think that the truth that John is struggling here to utter is just the perfect symmetries of glory. There can never be disproportions in the heavens ; the heights and the lengths and the breadths are always equal. John may be speaking of the city here, but he is really thinking of the citizens. And let their lives run out into the length of an eternal purpose, and broaden out with the whole breadth of heaven into sweet fellowship and rich communion, and rise to an undreamed-of height into the knowledge and the love of God, there will be never any disproportion there. There will be nothing ill-developed or unsymmetrical. In the heavenly citizenship, if not in the heavenly city, the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.

But you will mark, that if the perfect life is to be quite symmetrical, that does not mean it is to

be all the same. We are apt to confuse symmetry and sameness, but symmetry is one thing and sameness quite another. In your street, for instance, the houses may be identical. Window for window, room for room, from the first number to the last they are the same. Yet what a want of the beauty of symmetry there is in the common street of the ordinary city, there is not one of us here but knows too well. But out in the woods there are no two trees the same. There is infinite difference in their droop and swing. And yet I cannot see them from the road, as they rise black against this February sky, but they show the wonderful symmetries of God. And so in the endless life there is no sameness, there is no dull and cheerless and wearisome monotony, but a carrying out of individual character on its own lines to its own completeness until the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.

Now one of the first things that impresses us in human life is the want of proportion in men's actual characters. It is not that they are not perfect, we do not look for that. It is that within the circle of the possible they are so far from anything like symmetry. All character has got

a threefold aspect. There are the duties of a man towards himself. There are the outgoings of his life towards his brother. There are the upgoings of his heart towards his God. And we only need to look within a little, or to think of the men we know, the men we love best, to feel that here, whatever it may be yonder, the length and the breadth and the height are never equal. One man is sympathetic, generous, with infinite capacity for kindness; but his will is weak, he is not resolute, he has no grip of a great end in life. And another is resolute, determined, pushing, he sees his goal far off and makes for it; but he lacks breadth, that broad and kindly brotherhood of heart that makes life like a sweet song day by day. We are like stained-glass windows in some great cathedral, and the light of the morning is longing to stream in; but we break up that white and perfect light, and only pass on the crimson or the gold, till 'life, like a dome of many-coloured glass, stains the white radiance of eternity.'

That, then, impresses us in actual life: a want of proportion and symmetry in character. And there can be little question that just that want of symmetry is often essential to what men call

16 THE PROPORTIONS OF LIFE

success. For competition is very bitter now, and knowledge to an extraordinary degree is specialised; and unless a man gives heart and brain to one thing, with the deliberate sacrifice of larger interests, it sometimes seems impossible to get on. You remember how Darwin bitterly lamented that, in his intense absorption in his science, he had ceased to be able to appreciate Shakespeare. And yet had he kept an open heart for Shakespeare, the question is, would he ever have been Darwin? An age of specialism does splendid work, but I do not know that it makes splendid men. It is so hard to be earnest for a rounded character, it is so hard to determine that the length and the breadth and the height of it shall be equal, when it almost seems a condition of success that we be passionately centred in one thing. And is that the meaning of God's discipline of failure? Is it meant to cast men out of their narrow groove and give them a fuller and more harmonious life? I do not know. But I know that often what we call success leaves a man's character quite undeveloped: there is no breadth in it, there is no height at all. And what we call failure with all its breaking of the

deeps, with its humility, and with its sympathies, even with its shame, so changes the whole aspect of the world, and the outlook of a man upon the world, that the dullest eye reads in his inward life the promise of that morning of our text when the length and the breadth and the height of it shall be equal.

Now there is one thing, brethren, we may be sure of: that the moral blessings we shall win in heaven are the moral blessings that we long for here. I should expect to find, then, even to-night, some feeling of anger at our ill-developed characters, some longing for a better-proportioned life. Well, what is the meaning of the value we set upon the very qualities we lack? Why do we prize so highly what we have not, and set so little store by what we are? If I were thoroughly pleased with my own character, I should never dream of coveting my neighbour's. It is the hungering of my spirit for completeness, it is the cry of my fragmentary life for symmetry, that jealous desire for what is best in others. It is the call of my soul for the qualities she lacks, that the length and the breadth and the height may all be equal. When you are brave,

you do not envy the bravery of others. When you are sympathetic, you do not covet another's sympathetic heart. But lacking bravery, how you admire it. And lacking sympathy, what a choice grace it seems. It is your character conscious of incompleteness, and longing for the beauty of symmetry to-night.

Or again, did you never notice how men of opposite temperaments draw together? We might almost call it one of the laws of friendship that men are attracted by their opposites. We say that birds of a feather flock together; but that is a proverb, and only half a truth. The deepest, the tenderest friendships in the world have been conspicuous for the reverse. Were David and Jonathan men of one stamp and mould? What a great gulf between aged and heroic Paul and tender and timorous and youthful Timothy! Yet the hearts of David and Jonathan were knit together. And the friendship of Paul and Timothy was wonderful. For we do not want our double in our friend. One of ourselves is quite enough, God knows. We want, unconsciously perhaps, but very truly, the man who will help us to complete the circle. We

want a heart that, being knit with ours, will help us towards the symmetry we lack. And so our friendships and our loves and marriages, when they are made and fashioned upon God's lines, are present strugglings towards that coming harmony when the length and the breadth and the height shall be equal.

Now over against our ill-proportioned characters, there stands the perfect symmetry of the character of Jesus. And of that symmetry there is no better proof than this, that we can hardly speak of the character of Christ at all. I say of one man, he has a gentle character : there is the touch of tenderness in all he does. I say of another, he has a powerful character. You feel the pressure of an imperious will in it. And I say of another, he has a beautiful character : its distinguishing mark is not will, but sensibility—he is swift to receive and to return impressions. But Christ, He was gentle and powerful and beautiful in one. And you cannot describe the character of Jesus. All that is best in the thousand hearts of men, and all that is noblest in the separate types, meets and is crowned in the Redeemer. For once, brethren, there was heaven

on earth when Christ was here, and the length and the breadth and the height of life were equal.

And the wonder is that, being so, there should be such an endless attractiveness in Jesus. For it is quite notorious how all the poets have failed to interest their readers in a perfect man. Let any novelist try to describe a character that is flawless, proportioned, perfectly symmetrical, and the image fades so far from all reality that in twenty pages the character is dead. I question if, in all the literatures of the world, there has been one novelist, one dramatist, who ever invested with a living charm a character that was not touched with sin. But in its length, its onward reach to Calvary, there was no flaw in the character of Jesus. And in its breadth, its sympathy and love, it was complete. And in its height, its perfect trust in God, and its perfect reliance on a Father's will, it was so true that even the atheist admits that our Redeemer had a genius for religion. And yet, in spite of that perfect symmetry of character—and I use the words 'in spite of' quite deliberately—there was never a life with such a charm for man, and

never a character that so drew the world, as the life and the character of Jesus Christ.

I want you, then, to realise the blessing of coming into communion with that Lord. In the interest of your own manhood and your womanhood, I want you to share in the fellowship of the Christ. In the midst of the blinding specialism of the age, and all the contracting and narrowing tendencies abroad, there is no such help to a fully-rounded character as a constant friendship with Jesus Christ. I have a wide horizon when I walk with Jesus. I am lifted out of my rut and out of my groove. There are new interests, there are new outgoings, every day. There is new depth of purpose, there are new heights of hope. Wherever Christ is, is the New Jerusalem. And if I am with Him, it shall be here to-night. And I shall find dimly, and gropingly, and spite of that Frenchman's taunt about the prison-house, that in the citizenship of God is liberty, and the length and breadth and height of it are equal.

SINCERITY

Thou desirest truth in the inward parts.—Ps. ii. 6.

THERE is a remarkable foreshadowing of the insight of Christ Jesus in these words. They ring with that inwardness which is so clear a note of Jesus' moral teaching. We have been wont to think of the Old Testament as dealing with the outward sphere of action ; we have been wont to say that it was Jesus Who first ran down the act into the heart. But we must not separate the old and new by any hard and fast distinctions such as these. They intermingle, both in creed and character. If Abraham saw Christ's day and was glad, David saw Christ's day and was sad. He recognised God's passionate insistence that a man should be thoroughly sincere.

It is worth noting, too, that when David recognised this, he had a broken heart. David had sinned, and David was repentant ; and a

repentant man sees deep. There are some hours in life when we are blind ; hours when we see nothing and forget everything ; and all our past, and all our honour, and duty and God, and heaven and hell, fade and are blotted out. But when repentance comes, we see again. We see what we have done and what we are. We touch a sinfulness far deeper than our act. And that was David's case. On common days he might have been content with common sacrifices ; but in an hour like this it was 'Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,' and 'Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts.'

This, then, is God's insistence on sincerity. And it is on sincerity I wish to speak to-night.

And first a threefold cause of insincerity.

It is always a hard thing to be sincere. Life is so full of little insincerities, like the gay motes that people the sunbeam, that it is often the man who is seriously struggling to be true, who feels most keenly how untrue he is. It is always a hard thing to be sincere. But there are times when it is harder than at other times. And it is especially hard to-day.

One cause of this is the fierce struggle for

existence now. There is a fierceness in modern competition that makes it very hard for a man to be a man. There are so many interests involved, so many whirling wheels within the wheels, that to be true to self is difficult. Men are not free as the shepherd on the hills is free. Men are combined and interlocked in the great mechanism of modern life ; until at last, to say what a man thinks and to be what a man is, is one of the quiet heroisms of the market. Thank God, there are such heroisms ! as worthy of honour as any deed upon the battlefield. But when to be sincere spells heroism, we must not wonder if insincerity is common. Few men are heroes. For one soul that has a passion for sincerity, there are a hundred that have a passion for success. And this, and the great gulf between the Monday's warfare and the Sunday's worship, and the compliances, and the accommodations, and the silences, have tinged our city life with insincerity.

I think, too, it is harder to be sincere because of the increasing power of common standards. I mean there never was a time when the thought of the many was so quickly voiced and registered. For centuries the people had no voice. They

lived and loved, and had their griefs, and died. But what their thought might be on the great themes mattered no more to their rulers than the thought of brutes. Then came the awakening of intelligence, the dawn of power, the rising of the people like a giant, the vote, the newspaper ; until to-day the thought of the people has been caught and voiced, and public opinion is a dominant power. It is an untold blessing. But the voice of the people is not always the voice of God, and in the tremendous pressure of a general opinion, it is harder for a man to be himself. It is a difficult thing to be a nonconformist now. It is a difficult thing to be an individual. I am so apt to be all warped and pressed out of the mental form that God has given me ; until my life becomes a play-acting and all the world a stage, and I have not the courage to think, and I have not the heart to feel, and I have not the heroism to be, myself. And losing my individuality, I cease to be sincere.

But perhaps the deepest cause of insincerity is this, that we are living in a transition time. All times to some extent are that. There is never an age, however dull and dead, but the

old like a river is watering its plains, and the new like a spring leaps up into the light. But there are some times when the transition is very sharp and clear, and we are living in such a time as that to-day. Old things are passing. Old faiths are in the crucible again. Old truths have got to be recast and readjusted. There is not a doctrine, whether of heart or Bible, but earnest minds are trying to reset it in the larger knowledge of these latter days. Here in one pew a father and son are sitting ; and though the father may never dream of it, there is the space of centuries between the two. For the father, with all the loyalty of his heart, still clings to the great message of the past ; and to the son all the strain is this, to reconcile that message of his childhood with the wider horizon that he cannot yield.

That is the pain of a transition time. There can be little question that for many the only anodyne for that pain is insincerity. It were impossible, it were utterly wrong, to cast away the past. It has meant too much for us, and been too much to us, for that. It were impossible, it were utterly wrong, to flout the new.

It is the air we breathe. It is from God. So springs the temptation to be insincere. To join in the worship that was formed and fashioned when faith was an enthusiasm, to sing the hymns that were the music of unclouded souls, though the enthusiasm of our faith is gone, and there is more cloud than sunshine in the sky.

So for a threefold cause; and now for a threefold curse of insincerity.

And the first curse of insincerity is this. It takes all dignity out of the heart of life, and makes this world a very mean place. We think we can be insincere, and men will be tricked and never find it out. O brethren, God Almighty has his own awful ways of writing a man's insincerity upon the heavens and graving it as with a pen of iron on the world. All reverence is impossible, all purity is stained, all innocence rebukes me, when I am insincere. If I am false and double, I cannot hear the laughter of my children but it sends a pang and pain into my heart. Better be passionate, better be inconsistent, better be dead than insincere. Peter was passionate, brimful of inconsistencies; yet if ever a sincere heart beat, it was the heart of Peter—and Jesus was Christ to

Peter and heaven was heaven. But Judas, I know not what his other sins were, but Judas was insincere; till he came to feel the very sincerity of Jesus like an insult; and, insincere, went to his own place.

But insincerity carries another curse. I hardly think that there is any sin that mars and distorts the character like this. That master theologian Augustine gave us a phrase that has become historic. He spoke of splendid sins. And perhaps there are some sins that in some lights, though not the light of God, have certain elements of splendour in them. But all the insight and all the love of Augustine could never find an element of splendour in the man or woman who had ceased to be sincere. There is no sin so eats the manhood out of us as insincerity. There is no sin that so robs character of its quiet and restfulness and strength, and leaves it restless, shifty, self-assertive, loud. The nation has often wondered at the sweet equanimity of our revered Queen. And it was Bright who said the Queen was the most truthful being he had ever met. It is the insincere man who exaggerates. It is the insincere who flatters. It is the insincere who

plays the coward in the crisis. When I have won something of the sincerity of Christ, I shall know something of His strength and peace.

And the third curse is this. No sin so surely saps and undermines our influence. Perhaps you think you have no influence. You feel yourself a very uninfluential person. Come! humblest woman in this church to-night, it is not so. Most of us think far too much of our abilities, and far too little of our influence. We are so interwoven in the web of life that we are making and moulding each other every day. In ways mysterious, out of the depths of this mysterious self, we touch and turn each other. And perhaps the men who influence us most are the men who never tried to influence us at all. Now the one bolt that falls out of the blue to shatter this unconscious influence of character is insincerity. I may be ignorant, and men may not despise me. I may be narrow, and still command respect. But ignorant or learned, narrow or broad, once let men feel that I am insincere, and all my influence for good, and all my influence for God, is gone. It's a sad hour when a son sees through his father. Sad for the father, twice sad for the

son. And let a minister have the eloquence of Paul ; but if his people distrust him, there will be no changed hearts. It is God's curse on insincerity. It is the separating, isolating power of that heart-sin. There is no more heart-lonely creature in the world than the man or woman who has grown insincere. And to be heart-lonely for ever, that is hell.

Time flies ; and I must briefly indicate the path to a renewed sincerity.

And first we must win a deeper reverence for ourselves. We must believe in individual possibilities. We must remember there are no nobodies with God. If I am but a leaf tossed by the wind, if I am but a flake carried on the stream, if I am but a light that flashes and is gone, if it will be all the same a hundred years hence, it matters little whether I am sincere or not. I must not mock myself with any self-importance. But if I am a man, called into being by an everlasting God, nurtured and bosomed in an eternal love, gifted with faculties that only eternity can ripen, and filled with a ceaseless craving for the truth, to be untrue to self is the true atheism. Therefore, when I am tempted to be insincere, I fall back

first upon the Bible doctrine, not of God, but man. I see my weakness there. I see my fall. But I see there such hopes for *me*, such possibilities for *me*, that to be me—myself—becomes a new ambition. And to be myself is to be sincere.

Then we must win a profounder faith in God. There is no choice for it. We simply must. I defy any man to be consciously insincere who lives under these eyes that are a flame of fire. It is because God is distant, hidden in the clouds that are around His throne, that we dare be one man *within*, another man *without*. The old religious sculptors, says a writer, who came to their tasks with prayer and meditation on unearthly beauty, would never suffer any imperfect workmanship, even though placed where man could never see it. And when one questioned them why the concealed parts of statues removed from human sight should be so exquisitely wrought, they answered that the eyes of the gods were there. ‘Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my goings are passed over from my God?’ It is a speech like Jacob’s that makes insincerity so

easy. It is the practice of God's presence makes it hard.

And we must gain a closer fellowship with Christ. Of all the helps whereby I struggle onwards towards sincerity, there is none like daily fellowship with Him. If it ennobles me to live with noble souls, and makes me purer to have a pure woman for my friend, how will it shame me into a new sincerity to live with the sincerest heart that ever beat! There are some men with whom I could not gossip. There are some men in whose presence slander dies. There is one Man whose very company kills insincerity, and that is Christ. When I am near to Him, and He to me, I am proportionately true. When I have lost Him, banished Him, driven Him from His centre and His throne, like a strong tide my insincerity creeps up again.

One word and I am done. There is a sad lack of sincerity to-day. But do not let that blind us to the fact that sincerity is not the only virtue. I am not necessarily good, I am not necessarily right, I am not necessarily saved, because I am sincere. There is a call for new sincerity in every heart, yet that sincerity is but a stepping-stone. I

may sincerely believe the earth is flat, yet for all my sincerity the earth is round. I may sincerely hold my friend to be a hero, and for all that my friend may be a scamp. I may sincerely be convinced Christ never rose, yet for all that Christ may have risen and be at the right hand of God to-day. Sincerity without humility is but a bastard virtue. It is the obstinacy out of which fools are made. The truly sincere man is always humble, feels like a child amid God's infinite mysteries, longs for a nobler music, cries in his heart, 'Light, light, more light'; till God in His own way leads him there. And the light is light indeed, and the light indeed is love. And neither height nor depth, nor life nor death, nor any other creature, shall separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

THE FRIVOLOUS SPIRIT

But they made light of it.—Matt. xxii. 5.

ONE thing that strikes us in this parable is the intense earnestness of the king. It is quite clear that his whole heart is in the marriage. We have all had our share of heartless invitations. We have all been assured that they would be delighted to see us, when we knew quite well that they would be still more delighted if we stayed away. And as the heart through altering ages keeps terribly true to its own mockeries, I have no doubt such spurious welcomes were as common in our Lord's day as in ours. But this king was thoroughly in earnest. He was determined that those who were bidden should come. Servants were sent, and on their heels more servants. And the feast was served, and the seats were empty, and the occasion was a marriage, and the host a king;

and ‘they made light of it and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise.’

There are of course some things that every wise man will make light of. There are petty grievances in every lot ; there are trifling insults offered to every man and woman ; there are words that irritate and sting and rankle ; and there always will be such till the world comes to the perfect courtesy of Jesus. And will my heart be bound by spiders’ webs like these ? And am I to worry and let the sun be darkened because every neighbour is not God’s gentlewoman ? ‘Think, sir,’ said Dr. Johnson to a worrying friend, ‘think, sir, how infinitely little that will seem a twelve-month hence.’ And a greater than Dr. Johnson had the secret too : ‘our light affliction which is but for a moment.’ It is an untold blessing to have a little vision and a little humour, and see things in their true sizes and proportions. There is a gentle art of making light.

But it is the corruption of the best that is the worst : and it is the overstraining of our instincts that degrades us : and it is the making light of everything that is our ruin. Do you think these guests had been serious and earnest men up till

the hour when they received that invitation? Do you think their characters were twisted in a moment—changed from some unrecorded nobility into this pitiful mockery of the king? God does not tamper with character like that. No man begins to be frivolous by mocking kings. They had made light of their mother's tenderness and love and tears when they were children. They had made light of purity when they were youths. They had made light of conscience in their merchandise: they had made light of honesty in managing their farms. And now comes the invitation of the king, the crowning, culminating, decisive moment in their lives: and their past arrests them, and they are true to all that they have made themselves, and they made light of that.

O irresistible logic of a life! O sin, frivolity, tracking me like a bloodhound, and finding me out at last! I never meant to be frivolous with God. I never meant to snap my fingers at the love, and tenderness, and passionate invitations of the Saviour. But I made a jest of the sanctities of home. And I played fast and loose with love and duty. And I had a sneer for every noble character, and an explanation of my own for every

noble deed. Till now I find too plainly, yes, too plainly, that in making light of earnestness wheresoever found, of enthusiasm in whatsoever cause, and of unselfishness in any humble soul, I have been making light of God Who gave the gifts, and of Christ Who is calling me to feast with Him.

These men, then, of our text were essentially frivolous. And I want to guard you now against a common mistake. I want you to remember that there is a whole world of difference between frivolity and a truly buoyant spirit. It is one thing to be a light weight. It is quite another thing to be light-hearted. Many a solemn face is but a mask for an utterly frivolous and petty soul. And many a heart that is tremendously in earnest about life, has the most infectious laugh in the whole company. The Pharisees were most supremely solemn; but, on the testimony of Jesus, most supremely flippant. ‘But I wonder,’ says Charles Kingsley, ‘if there is any home in England where there is so much laughter as there is in ours’: yet was there ever a home so filled with reverence for what is highest? We read in one of the old stories of the North, that when

the hero fought his last fight in the great hall of Worms, every blow he struck was also a note of music ; and that is no bad picture of the buoyant heart that carries something of heaven's music into the din and dust of the battle of life. But when Rome was burning, Nero was fiddling ; and all frivolity was gathered up in that. If the cheap merriment of fools be what you mean by happiness, be frivolous, be flippant to your heart's content ! But if there be a joy in life so deep that its roots are intertwined with all the roots of pain, and a great gladness that shines like a rainbow against the darkest sky, then in God's name do not be frivolous, take life in the royal manner, do not make light of the great truths and the great hopes and the great passions and the great God—the sun and moon and morning stars of the mystical universe of your heart and mine.

I am quite aware frivolity is sometimes a protest. It is the mad wild gambolling of the dog that has been kept in the kennel and on the chain too long. When I read, for instance, the literature of the Restoration period, and catch a sight through the pages of its drama of the shockingly frivolous life of the days of King

Charles the Second, I feel at once that this is not natural: it is the reaction from the too stern spirit that called even the village Maypole sinful. And a wise father will be very careful that there is no room for that protest in his home. And a wise church will see to it that she never gives any cause for that reaction. A listless and lifeless congregation, where the great mysteries are never glorified, where the brightness of Jesus and of heaven never shines, and where to sing too beautifully is a crime, is one of the best instruments that Satan ever had for driving the young into frivolity. God help the church that sees a daily commentary on her deadness in the flippant lives of her young men and women. I want a church that shall be reverent, yet bright. I want a church that shall be deep, yet happy. I want a church that is true to the future as well as to the past. I want a church where our young men shall feel that joy is stern, that love is deep, that life is wonderful, that God is high. If I can build that Jacob's ladder, even in a dream, I have made a path right to the feet of Christ.

There is a double condemnation of frivolity: and the first thing that condemns it is this—it is

utterly insufficient for life's journey. There are worse bankruptcies than ever come before the courts. There are men who go bankrupt in hope, in aspiration, in ideal, long before the end. And life is far too grim, and sometimes far too sad, to be carried through with a frivolous heart. If there were no tears, no trial, no sorrow, no tragedy, no death, a frivolous heart might be equal to the great task of Living. But when sorrow and trial are never far away, when to-morrow may find me standing by an open grave, when the undertone of all life's song is Calvary, I need a sterner and a stronger spirit if I am to come victorious to the end. One touch of nipping frost, and the gaudy insects of the summer-time are gone. One winter's storm, and the frail pleasure-boat is swept on to the beach. One draught of bitterness and gall and death, and the frivolous heart is helpless, impotent.

And is not that one task of sorrow in the world? It sobers, sanctifies: brings men and women to themselves again, and bringing them to themselves leads them to God. Did you ever know a man or woman who was really frivolous

after a great sorrow? But we have all known hearts whose jingling chords have been touched into a music of unexpected depth, when the hand that touched them was the hand of death. Do you remember how the poet sings—

Then was the truth received into my heart,
That under heaviest sorrow earth can bring,
If from the affliction somewhere do not grow
Honour which could not else have been ; a faith,
An elevation, and a sanctity ;
If new strength be not given nor old restored,
The blame is ours, not nature's.

But for us who are Christians there is another condemnation of frivolity. It is the fact that Jesus our teacher and our Lord has mightily increased the seriousness of life. I could understand an old pagan being frivolous, for for him there was nothing infinite in man. But Jesus has come, and God has tabernacled and tabernacles still in man ; and life has been lifted into heavenly meanings, and swung out through death into eternal ages ; and when my life means fellowship, kinship with God, eternity, then to be frivolous is antichrist.

Young men and women, you know I do not

want you to be solemn. I do not wish you to be dull. I want your sky to be as bright as heaven. But as you have a life to live, and as you have a death to die, do not make light of the great things of the soul. Do not make light of duty. Do not make light of purity. Do not make light of sin. Do not make light of *now*. Above all, in all, through all, do not make light of Christ. For to be Christ's is manhood, power, victory. And to make light of Christ is death.

TO THE DISHEARTENED

Why art thou cast down, O my soul?—Ps. xlii. 5.

It is one source of the eternal freshness of the psalms that they tell the story of a struggling soul. They open a window on to that battlefield with which no other battle can be compared—the moral struggle of the individual with himself. And it is well that that story should be told in poetry. There is nothing like poetry for describing battles. For there is a rich suggestiveness in poetry, a rush of emotion, an enthusiasm, that catches and conveys the excitement of the field. The dullest war-correspondent grows poetical, his words become coloured, vivid, picturesque, when he narrates the actions in the war. It was right, then, that for this warfare of the soul we should have the strong music of the psalms.

Now as we read that story of the psalmist's struggle, one of the first things to arrest us is just the likeness of that battle to our own. Ages have fled, and everything is different, since the shepherd-king poured out his heart in melody. And yet his failures and his hopes are so like yours, he might have been shepherding and reigning yesterday. We are so apt to think we fight alone. We are so prone to think there never was a life so weak, so ragged, so full of a dull gnawing, as ours. We are so ready to believe that we have suffered more than any heart that ever loved and lost. And then God opens up the heart of David, and we see its failures and we hear its cries, and the sense of loneliness at least is gone. He prayed as you have prayed. He fell as you have fallen. He rose and started again as you have done. He was disheartened, and so are we.

I want then to speak of disheartenment to-night. And there is one temperament that is peculiarly exposed to that temptation. It is that of the eager and sensitive and earnest soul. If you are never in earnest about anything, you may escape disheartening altogether. To be dis-

heartened is a kind of price we pay for having a glimpse at the heavens now and then. 'The mark of rank in nature is capacity for pain; And the anguish of the singer makes the sweetness of the strain.' So the dull pain of being disheartened now and then is the other side of a man's capacity for enthusiasm. Give me a flood-tide and I shall expect an ebb. Give me an earnest, daring, generous, royal heart, and I shall know where to discover melancholy.

And one word I should like to say in here. Never pass judgments in your disheartened hours. It is part of the conduct of an honest soul never to take the verdict of its melancholy. The hours come when everything seems wrong. And all that we do, and all that we are, seems worthless. And by a strange and subtle trick of darkness, it is just then we set to judge ourselves. Suspend all judgment when you are disheartened. Tear into fragments the verdict of your melancholy. Wait till the sunshine comes, wait till the light of the countenance of God comes, then judge —you cannot judge without the light. But in your darkness, stay yourself on God and act. Disheartenment is the wise man's time

for striking out. It is only the fool's time for summing up.

No doubt there is a physical element in much disheartenment. There is a want of oxygen, there is a lack of sunshine and the hills about it. When we are badly nourished, and badly clothed, and live and sleep in a vitiated atmosphere, it is so very easy to lose heart. And all that inter-working of body and soul, with the reaction of a man's environment upon his life, should make us very charitable to our neighbour. If you knew everything, you would find more heroism in a smiling face sometimes than in the gallantest deed out in South Africa. Make every allowance for a disheartened neighbour. Be charitable. Be helpful and be kind. But in the name of the Christlike character you strive for, make no allowance, brother, for yourself. Allowance is but the pet name for excuse. It speaks of that tender handling of ourselves which is so utterly foreign to a vigorous manhood. I must make no excuse. I must be at it when I feel least like it. It is so much better to live nobly than live long.

Now what are the common causes of dis-

heartening? I think we can lay our hand on some, at any rate. And the first is the long and monotonous stretches of our life. 'Variety's the very spice of life, and gives it all its flavour,' sings the poet. And when there is no variety at all, no new horizon in the morning, but the same work and the same haunting worry, day in day out, we are all apt to grow disheartened. It is a dreary business walking in the country when the dusty road, without a turn or a bend, stretches ahead of you for miles. If there was only some dip and rise about the road, some unexpected vistas, some surprises, you would cover the distance and never think of it. It is the sameness that disheartens us. It is the dreary monotony of my life's journey; until we lose all spring and spontaneity, all freshness of feeling, all power to react, and we live and work mechanically, deadly.

Another cause is bitter disappointment. When we have made our plans, and suddenly they are shattered; when we have built our castles, and the gale comes and brings them down in ruin at our feet; when the ties are wrenched, and the loving heart is emptied, and in the bitterness of

death the grave is full—we are all ready to be disheartened then. For where our treasure is, there shall our hearts be also; and when our treasure vanishes, our heart is gone. The poet Wordsworth, whose calm, deep verse we should all keep reading in these hurrying days—the poet Wordsworth tells us of the utter disheartening that fell on him after the French Revolution. He had hoped great things from that stormy time. He had hoped for the birth of brotherhood and freedom. He had thought that the race was going to shake its fetters off and proclaim the dignity of man at last. And when these dreams were blighted, as they were, and instead of liberty and true equality there came the tumbril, and the guillotine, and blood, ‘I lost,’ says Wordsworth,

‘All feeling of conviction, and in fine
Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
Yielded up moral questions in despair.’

It was his terrible disappointment that disheartened him. Perhaps it is that, friend, that has disheartened you.

Another cause of the deepest disheartening is

this: it is the apparent uselessness of all we do. It is the partial failure, it is the lack of progress, it is the fact that I strive and never seem to attain, that lies at the root of spiritual despondency. ‘Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp, or what’s a heaven for?’ says Andrea. And this very psalm from which we took our text to-night, that thrills and wails with spiritual depression, begins with the cry of the soul after the Infinite ‘as the hart pants after the water-brooks.’ It is the other side of my glory, that disheartening. It is the witness of my kinship with infinitude. I am never satisfied: there is always another hill-top. I am never at rest: there is a better somewhere. And so I am disheartened—fool!—because I am something better than a beast, and have been made to crave, to strive, to yearn, to hope, unsatisfied, till the day break and the shadows flee away.

Now I shall venture to give some counsels against disheartenment,¹ and the first is this: disheartenment can often be dispelled by action. A friend who knew Robert Browning well has

¹ I have received help here from the sermons of Dean Paget.

said of him, that one of his priceless qualities for this generation was that he always made effort seem worth while. You came into his presence restless, wearied, with all the edge taken off moral effort by the doubts and criticisms of this troubled age, and you left him feeling that spite of a thousand doubts, the humblest effort heavenward was worth while. O how I wish that every young man and woman who comes here could go out and feel the same thing of this pulpit ! For what we want to-day is not more light. What we want is more quiet fortitude. It is to believe that effort is worth while. It is to hold to it, though the city deny it, that man shall not live by bread alone. And though it is very easy to preach that, and we read it and sing it like a common thing, there is the power of God in it against moral collapse, and the makings of moral heroism on its bosom.

And this is my second counsel to the disheartened. Remember, friend, what others have to suffer. Look round you and see the burden of your neighbour, and mark the patience and sweetness of the man, until, in that great brotherhood of trial, you ask God to forgive your gloom

and bitterness. In the theatre of the ancient Greeks—and the theatre was religious, it was not vulgar then—they played great tragedies, and brought the sorrows and passions of the noble on the stage. And the men and women of Athens went to see them, and by the portrayal of these mightier sorrows, their own so shrunk into an insignificance that they went home with something of new hope in them, and the determination to be braver now. There are such tragedies to-day, my friend, and you can not only witness, you can help. ‘When you are quite despondent,’ said Mr. Keble, ‘the best way is to go out and do something kind to somebody.’

And lastly, in your hours of disheartening, just ask if there was ever a man on earth who had such cause to be disheartened as our Lord. What griefs, what exquisite sorrows, and what agonies! what seeming failure, what crushing disappointment! Yet on the very eve of Gethsemane and Calvary our wonderful Lord is talking of His joy. And when heart fails and faints, and I lose power to will, and my arm hangs helpless, and my soul seems dead, there is nothing like coming right to the feet of Jesus, and crying with Peter, ‘Lord,

save me or I perish.' It is then that I take heart again to sing —

The night is mother of the day,
The Winter of the Spring,
And ever upon old decay
The greenest mosses cling.
Behind the cloud the starlight lurks,
Through showers the sunbeams fall,
For God who loveth all His works,
Hath left His hope with all.

VISION AND DUTY

And Samuel opened the doors of the house of the Lord.

1 Sam. iii. 15.

SAMUEL was but a child, yet he was ministering in the house of God. There was work for the children in the Jewish tabernacle, and there should be work for the children in the Christian church. His duties were not heavy, certainly. He opened and shut the doors of the Lord's house. Perhaps David had been reading the story of Samuel again when he sang, 'I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in tents of sin.'

Well, we have read this chapter together to-night, and we all know how, when the lamp burned dim, God called to Samuel. 'Samuel, Samuel' three times reiterated in his childish ear ; until at last, under the teaching of Eli, Samuel knew the speaker, and answered, 'Speak, Lord ! for thy servant heareth.' It was the vision of God to

Samuel ; it was the personal presence of the Almighty with the boy. It stirred him, thrilled him, moved him to the depths, as the coming of God into the life must always do. Yet Samuel lay until the morning, and in the morning opened the doors of the house of the Lord. Samuel had had his splendid vision. Samuel went back again to his simple duty.

That is our subject, then. And these three thoughts come swimming from the deeps of it : 1. Our duties are in strange contrast to our visions. 2. Our visions must never keep us from our duties. 3. Vision and duty sum up the Christian life. And may God grant us the guidance of His Spirit, that we may be taught and strengthened by His Word.

1. First, then, our duties are in strange contrast to our visions.

That this was so with Samuel, I hardly need to prove. It strikes us at once, as with a kind of incongruity, that he who has been face to face with the Almighty should be back at these menial duties in the morning. Yesterday Samuel was a child and lived in a childish world. His furthest horizon was his mother's home. It was a great

thing yesterday to be a doorkeeper. But his little world had grown during the night. It had widened out to embrace the eternal God. And in that vaster universe, and under that exaltation of the soul that every widening of outlook brings, it was almost incongruous to be opening doors. If God had called him to preach when the sun rose ; if God had bidden him slay Hophni and Phinehas, that would have been a task in keeping with his vision. But to sweep the floor and open the gates, after the vision of God had come to him—'twas a strange contrast that.

And yet I question if it was any stranger than the contrast between your vision and your task. If we could only tell what you have dreamed, if we could only see what golden ships have sailed into the cloudland of your heaven, if we but knew your visions of a perfect life and of a spotless day, and then compared them with your actual self and life, we should find a contrast, brother, just as glaring as that between the vision and the task of Samuel. Who knows what boundless hopes are in the heart when the hands are busied with the meanest offices ? Who knows what visions of God are in the soul when the weary fingers are

working at the loom? I must not judge a man by what I see. I must not reckon him merely by his task. He may be only a gatekeeper like Samuel; yet God may have spoken to him, as he spoke to Samuel, and his heart may be radiant with the light of heaven.

So marked, indeed, is this contrast between task and vision, that the sweet illusions which we never realise, seem almost to be a ministry of God. When Abraham went out, not knowing whither he went, turning his back upon his father's country, what made him strong? what nerved him for his journey? It was the vision of Canaan that his God had promised him. Yet to his dying hour Abraham was a wanderer in that land, and won no more of it than made a grave. And when I see him fighting the kings there, and herding his flocks and haggling for a tomb, I feel what a gulf there was between *his* vision and the actual duties laid to his hand to do. Yet the little he did he never could have done but for the light that cheered him on. And when the day broke and the shadows fled away, the vision that had never been realised on earth was realised and perfected in heaven!

Has God no leadership like that for you? Is it not the contrast between your vision and your fact that makes you struggle through another to-morrow, and lift up your brow heroically against another morning? I am content never to realise. I am content to be kept struggling, striving. Forward unto the truth! Forward into the light! Through trial and weariness and disappointment, forward! And if here the vision seems to mock my search, and the things I crave for baffle me, elude me, I know that yonder, in the full light and liberty, where there is no more curse nor death, and sorrow and sighing have fled away, I shall be satisfied when I awake!

2. That leads me naturally to our second thought: our visions must never keep us from our duties. I always honour Samuel when I read this verse. If the boy is the father of the man, as we are told, I find here something of that faithfulness and something of that self-restraint that were to make Samuel a king of men. Can't you conceive the tumult of emotion that must have stirred his boyish heart that night? Can't you imagine how his frame would tingle at the voice? Yet in the morning, after the greatest moment in his life,

Samuel is at his post. Vision or no vision, voice or no voice, his duty must be done, and he will do it.

By way of contrast, think of Rhoda in the Acts. We have read to-night the story where Rhoda enters. Peter had been in prison and been released, and he came knocking at the door, and it was night. And Rhoda was sent to see who knocked so late: and Rhoda went and heard the voice of Peter. And such an excitement fell on that little maiden, such mingled fear and joy and wild surprise, that she clean forgot her duty in the thrill of it, and left the door barred in Peter's face. She heard the voice of Peter and forgot her duty. But Samuel heard the voice of Peter's God. She quite forgot in her tumult to draw the bolts. But Samuel opened the doors of the house of the Lord. Vision or no vision, voice or no voice, his duty must be done, and he will do it.

And that is the spirit to carry into life. The firm conviction that nothing on heaven or earth must tamper with the duty that lies to hand. And it is strange, though it is very true, that among the many things that make our duty

hard, the vision, the widening outlook, should be one.

Did you never find it hard to settle down after a little holiday or travel? Yet if travelling and holiday mean anything, and are not a squandering of precious hours, they mean a widening outlook upon things and a growing vision of the beauty of the world. Did you never find it hard to pick the threads of duty up after a blow, an agony, a death? It was a vision of Calvary, that hour. It was a glimpse of the eternal world seen through the open grave. And it was hard in the morning to open the doors again. We want the spirit of Samuel at such times. It is because I believe in the sovereignty of God that I believe in the supremacy of duty. Vision or no vision, voice or no voice, our duty must be done, and we will do it.

And the same thing meets us in another way. It meets us often in the case of genius. When a man once thinks he has a touch of genius, it is wonderful how he drives his chariot through morality. The humdrum virtues may be good enough for us, but for him there is another and a freer code. Poor fool! as if the laws of the Almighty are to halt when a spark of genius is

dancing in their path. As if genius could strike its pen through God's pronouncement, 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' Genius is intuition. Genius is vision. Are you a genius? It is so easy to slip into things questionable if we have once convinced ourselves that we are that. O friend, come to yourself to-night. There is one genius in a century, it may be ; you have one talent, five talents at the most. And even if you had the ten, and the ten were fused by the electric spark of heaven into that glowing unity that we call genius in our blundering way, even *then* to be pure, to be humble, to be temperate, were as imperative for you as for the humblest labourer in the field.

And coming nearer to things evangelical, remember that even the vision of God in Jesus Christ, the crowning vision that converts the soul, must never keep us from our common duties. I have known of young women who have been converted, and I believe really converted, saved. And once they kept the house and made home happy. But now there were so many meetings, they were never at home ; and when they were, they were very often cross ; and home was untidy, only half a home ;—and there wasn't a brother but

would have given a week's pay to get his sister thoroughly unsaved again. Have you seen God? Have you been saved by the precious blood of Jesus? And seekest thou great things for thyself? O seek them not. Be a better father by your own hearthstone. Be a holier mother among your growing children. Be a kinder husband to your neglected wife. Be a tenderer daughter. Be a more patient son. It is so easy anywhere else to play the Christian. It is so hard, so hard among our own.

Do you remember the Gadarene demoniac? I recall a sermon by Mr. Spurgeon on the man, and its title was 'Christ's curate in Decapolis.' Saved, healed, he wanted to follow Jesus everywhere, and tell the story of that amazing miracle; but Jesus said, No! get to your home again. Begin with your children, your neighbours, and your friends. Declare to them the glorious works of God. Let them take knowledge you have been with Me—and he is saying that to you to-night. O heart touched by the grace of God, it were a great thing to be a famous preacher; but to open the doors in the morning as did Samuel, to go to your dreary task with a new heart, to smile to-day

where yesterday you snarled, to take your cross up instead of cursing it, all that, with the conquest of your own heart within, were greater in God's sight than all the gifts.

3. Now my third thought was this, that vision and duty are true Christianity ; but the time has gone and I have somewhat anticipated this : let me but indicate the truth, and close.

The man who has only visions is a visionary. He builds his castles in the air, he dreams and dies. And it was a beautiful life, men say, and so it was. It was ethereal, heavenly, chaste as a flower. But the poor world goes staggering on in darkness, and the mere vision is powerless to save. That is the one extreme.

And the man who has only duties is a moralist. And if nineteen centuries have demonstrated anything, it is the powerlessness of mere morality to save. The rope is too short for a sinning and sinking world. That is the other extreme.

But in between these two, embracing both, there stands the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. What is its keynote?—‘Look unto me and be ye saved !’ What is its call?—‘Come unto me and I will give you rest.’ It is the vision of God in Jesus Christ,

forgiving, welcoming, cleansing, and adopting,—it is from that vision that I start. And does it leave me there? Does it leave me a visionary? God forbid. Starting from that, I set my face to duty. I press toward the mark empowered by the Holy Ghost. Until at last, when my little part is played, my tasks shall have the ‘well done’ from Jesus, and my vision shall brighten into the love of God.

UNSEEN ENVIRONMENT

Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see.
2 Kings vi. 17.

ELISHA had often been in great straits, but perhaps he had never been so hard bestead as that night in Dothan. The king of Syria was a heathen, but he had wit enough to see that it was Elisha and Elisha's God who were baffling and beating him on every hand. If he could only capture that man of God, it would be the turning-point in the campaign. And now Elisha was at Dothan, and Dothan was invested by the Syrian army. The fortunes of the prophet were desperate. His only hope was God.

Now among the men in Dothan who possessed good eyesight, I think Elisha's servant might be reckoned. He was a young man, leading an active life, an early riser. That morning in Dothan the sun was mounting heavenwards from the east, and he saw that. The birds were wing-

ing and wheeling over the trees, and he saw that. The light was flashing upon a thousand chariot-plates, and glancing from the burnished armour of ten thousand Syrians, and he saw that. And yet, when he came to Elisha and cried, 'Alas, my master, how shall we do?' Elisha fell upon his knees and prayed, 'Lord, open his eyes, that he may see!'

It is quite clear, then, that this keen-sighted young man did not see everything. Had there been nothing more to see, Elisha's prayer would have been mockery. The prophet's eyesight was no better than his servant's, and both looked out on the same hills and downs. But there were wonders for the prophet there, that the prophet's servant had quite failed to find. And the distinguishing element was God. 'And the Lord opened the young man's eyes; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.' He had seen everything except the brightest and the best. He had been blind to his unseen environment.

And so I gather that in the world around us there is the presence and power of a living God, and till we see that presence, we are blind. There

is more in the universe than sea and sky. There is more in suffering than the sting and agony. There is more in the Bible than chapter and verse. There is more in the church than eloquence or finance. There is the power of God, there is the presence of the Infinite, there are horses and chariots of fire around Elisha. And I may see and calculate and be clever to my heart's content, but till I feel *that* I am weak, and till I see *that* I am blind.

A recent writer has said that the classification of men with regard to religion will have to be changed soon. We shall not divide them into Catholics and Protestants, Churchmen and Dissenters, Presbyterians and Methodists, but into the men who see and the men who do not see. I ask a friend, Do you believe in God? and he is almost indignant at the question. But when I press him and get him to tell me something of this God, he describes to me the God of David, speaks of the God of Paul, grows eloquent over the God of covenanting or disruption times; or else he takes me into the distant future, and speaks of the love and joy and peace of heaven, when the shadows are gone and the night is fled away. But when I ask

him, What of your life to-night? what of this city's sin and cry to-night? I find that for the world's yesterday and for the world's to-morrow he believes, but for to-night he is an atheist. Once there were horses and chariots of fire, and there shall be again. But to-day there is nothing but the hills and moorlands, and the Assyrian army in the valley.

Oh, it is very hard to see God in to-day. It needs an opening of the eyes, like Elisha's servant got, to catch the trend of the everlasting love in the petty transactions of the present hour. When Hagar, flying with Ishmael, fell down in the desert, she looked, and everywhere was barren sand. And she would have given her very life for water, and all the time water was in her reach. One moment she was a dying slave, and in the next that desert hour was full of God. Her eyes were opened. It was a spiritual change. The God of Abraham had become Hagar's God! Did you ever hold in your hand one of these puzzle-cards on which there is something clearly and plainly drawn, and some face or figure in the lines that is not evident? Here is the garden, find the gardener, for example. And we study the card, and hold

it at all angles, and we turn it round and turn it back again, and for the life of us we cannot see the face, when in an instant, ah ! there it is ; and *now* we can see nothing else ; and we hand it on, and we wonder how our neighbour can possibly escape detecting what is so plain to us. ‘Lord, open his eyes, that he may see !’ And the Lord opened the young man’s eyes, and he saw.’ And the present moment was filled with the Divine. And the ministries of heaven were near at hand, for the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire.

We need to believe in the immanence of God. We cannot live without a spiritual environment. We must protest against the quasi-scientific spirit that refuses to rise above the secondary cause. For me the secondary must imply the first, and in the second the impulse of the first is vibrating. When Napoleon reminded the astronomer Laplace that his great treatise on the solar system contained no allusion to God, ‘Sire,’ said Laplace, ‘I had no need of that hypothesis.’ But for life and death we do need that hypothesis. And it is faith that makes the hypothesis our fact. I cannot argue out life’s greatest truths. I cannot demonstrate the great realities. There are infinite

meanings in this little life that baffle and baulk my fraction of a mind. O heart, O restless heart, believe thy cravings ! pray for that vision of the open eye ! The Spiritual, the Eternal, the Divine is here ! There standeth One among you whom ye know not.

I do not forget, in my pleading for spiritual vision, that there are some spheres where the holden eyes are blessed. I do not forget that it is the great compassion of God that keeps us half-blind from the cradle to the grave. They darken the bird's cage, they tell me, when they teach it to sing ; and unless the covering hand of the Almighty darkened the windows here, we should never sing, and never be strong at all. It is God's mercy that I do not see the future. It was God's grace that the mother's eyes were sealed, when long years ago she crooned her babe to sleep ; and her heart was radiant, and she dreamed her dreams—and where is her wandering boy to-night ? If we had known, if we had seen, could we have stood it ? It was compassion that hung that curtain on to-morrow. Do not forget that. Do not be blind to the untold blessings of our blindness. But I am not pleading for

vision for to-morrow. I am pleading for the recognition of the Divine to-day. It is to-night that there are horses and chariots around me. It is to-night that there are promises and helps for me. It is to-night that there is freedom from my sin, and full salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is to-night that He stands at the door and knocks. ‘Lord, open his eyes, that he may see ! And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man,’ —here and now !

And what is the moral value of this unseen environment ? It is this. It lifts me above circumstances. It shows me the mightier powers at work around me. It kindles my soul to claim and hold the mastery that I feel in my heart of hearts ought to be mine. Elisha’s servant went out to the hill that morning, and his heart sank and he was the slave of circumstance, and he cried, ‘Alas, master, how shall we do ?’ And then his eyes were opened, and he saw the countless chariots of heaven. And his heart was steadied, and his hope returned, and he was prepared to play the man again. He had a mighty foe, that was Assyria. He had a mightier ally, and that was God. O friend, it will never do to be the

sport of circumstances. Life is a failure if we are in the grip of passions and of appetites, and of outward and material and changing things. We were born to mould. We were born to control. We were born to be more than conquerors here and now. And the very weakest may be strong in Christ, and the very feeblest be powerful in God, if he will recognise that God is here, and that in every effort for the right, in every struggle to be true, in every sore endeavour to be free, the armies of Syria may block his way, but the horses and chariots of fire are at his bidding.

We have all rejoiced in the relief of Mafeking. We have been thrilled by the splendid endurance of these gallant hearts. We have watched them with ever-deepening admiration, as month by month, ever hopeful, ever cheerful, they baffled the enemy and fought with starvation, and looked death in the face. It was a noble, it was a magnificent achievement. And what was the secret of their indomitable spirit? What kept their hopes alive week after week? Around them were the Boers. Look where they would, there were the enemy's trenches and the enemy's guns. But behind the Boers was the unseen environment. It

was the armies of Britain. It was the advancing forces of the empire. It was the pledge and planning of a master-mind. And they trusted in the regiments they never saw, and they never doubted for an hour the general's word. And they were strong: and they are free: and the whole empire is ringing with their praise.

O brother, do not omit the Invisible in your reckoning. Do not forget that, back of the seen and temporal, there are the horses and chariots of Almighty God. Be strong, beleaguered heart! Endure as seeing Him Who is invisible. And an Empire, greater than Britain at her best, will welcome you home as a true man and soldier when the warfare of life is over, and the rest has come.

THE UNREAPED CORNER

And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field.—Lev. xix. 9.

WE are amazed at the minute directions given in the Law of Moses. It is the most wonderful attempt the world has known to take an inventory of human life. I fancy that few of us read Leviticus now. I wonder if there are ten households in the congregation that possess Andrew Bonar's mystical commentary upon it. But sometimes it is well to turn back to these chapters and to read them, if only to understand a little better the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. I should like to ask the mothers in this company how often they said to their children to-day, Take care ! do not do that ! if you do that again, your father will punish you. Well, the Jews who got this Law were spiritual children, and God had to deal with them as you with yours. But Jesus Christ abolished and fulfilled. He

scorned the rule, perhaps, but crowned the principle. He wrote in letters of blood across life's inventory the one word Love. And now, though I have never heard, it may be, of this unreaped corner, the poor can never be forgotten in my harvest if the spirit of Jesus is working in my life.

And yet it is notable that even in this Law there is a wonderful loving-kindness for the poor. On every harvest-field their claims were written. In every vintage, with all its song and music, God saw to it that the cry of the poor was heard. What! was there loving-kindness in the Law? was there compassion in the flames of Sinai? Yes, brother, glimmerings and gleams of that compassion that rose full-orbed upon the world in Jesus. We are so apt to forget that. We are so apt to draw a line between the Testaments, and say in the Old Testament all is harsh and terrible, in the New Testament all is sweet and kind. As if the one creating and inspiring God could change so radically in his revelations. I hear the thunders of Sinai around Calvary. I trace the mercy of Calvary at Sinai. The Gospel had not come yet, but the spirit of Jesus Christ was in

that Law. It was He Who lived and died for us, Who gave that sheaf in harvest to the poor.

I want, then, to uplift our text to-night. I want to set it in the light of Christ. And this is the first lesson that it teaches me: there are some corners of my field that are not mine. 'What!' says the farmer, 'did I not buy that field? Is it not mapped and measured in my title-deeds? Does not the boundary run down by that hedge, and round the corner, and along by the dyke? It is all mine. There's not a court on earth but would name me possessor of it.' Ah, friend, but there's a court in heaven. God comes! with all the antecedent claims of charity, and claims thy corners for thy poorer brother. And the whole expanse of harvest shall be yours, and the acres of golden grain shall fill your barn; but the little corners are hedged off for heaven: there are some corners of my field that are not mine.

Now, do you follow that? and do you understand the meaning of that parable? It is just thus God deals with every man in the practical conduct of his daily life. The cattle on a thousand hills are His, and every ear in the great

harvest-field ; but God in His wonderful loving-kindness comes to you and says, ‘Child, the whole field is yours to fill your granary : I only want the corners for Myself.’

Think of your time, for instance—that long field that is so often grey with dust and parched for rain : there are some corners of that field that are not yours. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work ; but round the seventh God plants His hedge. Is it extortionate ? Is it a cruel demand ? Shall I rebel and say my time is all my own ? O what a sorry thing our life becomes when we pilfer and rifle these silent hours of God ! I must have quiet places in my field. I must have corners where no sickle comes. I cannot live aright, I cannot think aright, I cannot pray aright, if I miss the secret of the unreaped corner.

But there is another lesson in our text : we are not meant to reap all we have sown. In the spring-time the sower went forth to sow. And with the deft movement of a practised hand, he scattered his seeds into the farthest corner. Then the sun shone, and the dews glistened, and the rain came down, and the harvest was ready to be reaped at last. But the farmer who had sown

was not to reap that corner. It was to be harvested by other hands. God bade him sow, scatter his precious seed. But God never meant him to reap all he had sown.

And such is the interlocking of our strange humanity, that no man ever reaps all he has sown. Some of our harvest, whether for good or ill, is left to be reaped by other hands than ours. As a man soweth, so shall he also reap. But what a man soweth, he shall not reap it all. There are always sheaves for those who follow after ; there are always gleanings and gatherings for the poor ; there are women and children who shall enter my field when I have reaped, and they shall be blessed or cursed by what I sowed.

Here is a young fellow sowing his wild oats. He came to Dundee out of a godly home, and why he came to church to-night he hardly knows. And he has been living such a life this week as he prays God his mother may never hear of. O brother, as you are sowing, you shall reap. Not all the grace of God, not all the agony of Christ on Calvary, are going to interfere with that for you. But the pity is you cannot exhaust your harvest. You cannot clear out the corners of your

field. Through all the subtle movements of the spirit, through the mysterious touch of life on life, through indefinable impulse from the devil, through look, through word, through act, others shall be worse because you were bad, and the stranger and the poor shall reap what you have sown !

But here is a woman who, in the quiet field of an unnoticed life, has been sowing self-sacrifice and self-denial for years. She is the oldest of the family, and her mother is dead. And when her mother was dying, the daughter promised her that she would be a mother to the children. And she prayed God for strength to keep her promise, and she hardly knew all that her promise meant. For opening womanhood came, and the world was glad, and love looked in at the lattice and beckoned her forth. But she turned her back on it, and she said No ! and she clung to her promise and was true to duty. And to look at that quiet and ageing face to-day, you could never tell that the heart was breaking once. But the boys are men now and the girls are women, and never was a queen so loved and crowned as is their eldest sister. She has sown in tears and she has reaped in joy. But, thanks

be to God, she cannot exhaust her harvest. There are sheaves for her brothers there and for her sisters. There are sheaves for their children and their children's children. Her influence will tell, her life will live, her character will speak when she is dead, and others will be better because she was good.

Brethren and sisters, there are few motives to honourable life so powerful with thinking men as this, that I can never reap all I have sown. If I could isolate my little field, if I could keep my sin all to myself, then sin might cease to be exceeding sinful. But when I remember that no man liveth to himself ; when I remember that all sin is anti-social ; when I am adding to the loneliness of men and to their sorrow, however secret and stealthy be my vice, there is a cry from humanity to have done with evil, and that voice of the people is the voice of God. Be true, and others will be heartened for the truth. Be patient, and you will be preaching when you think not. Be brave, and hearts shall be touched to courage by you. You will never know it. You will never understand how men are blessing you. We were never meant to reap all we have sown.

There is another simple lesson in our text, and you must not get home till I have touched on that. There is another lesson here, and it is this: we must be ready to be misunderstood. Think for one moment. I see two idlers standing by that field, leaning upon the wall and criticising, for I suppose that it was then as it is now, the men who did nothing were choice critics. Hark to them. 'Well, of all the wasteful farmers that I ever saw,' says one, 'that farmer is the worst. See his extravagance. He is so lazy and shiftless, he has never reaped his corners. A man like that is certain to come to ruin.' And the second agrees, and both of them are convinced that none but a shiftless, wasteful, and extravagant farmer would ever have left corners unreaped like that. Would you have said the same had you been there? Have you never cherished far harsher thoughts than that in taking a glance over your neighbour's field? O critical heart, putting the worst interpretation upon everything, it is well to remember that sometimes thou art wrong. It was God's command that that corner be not reaped. It was God's provision for the poor, that waste. That worldly wisdom by the

dyke would call it prodigal, but the farmer was willing to be misunderstood.

And every man who takes his life in earnest must be equally willing to be misunderstood. The world can never understand your unreaped corner. They will call it quixotic and folly to the end. They do not see that the love of heaven is in it. They cannot feel that the touch of God is there. If I am living by an eternal standard, if I am striving for an immortal crown, if I am following the light of Calvary, though with what failure, and fall, and staggering God knows, how can I hope to be understood by him who sees my fall, but never hears my cry? Be true to the heavenly vision. Be sincere. The unreaped corner will be reaped by and by. And when it is reaped and the hand of the poor is in it, and they are thanking God for you and blessing you, then your strange conduct will be explained at last. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men. ‘And inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My little ones, ye have done it unto Me.’

THE REFUSALS OF CHRIST

IT has been pointed out by that subtle and suggestive writer, De Quincey, that it is easy to see the positive characteristics of a writer, but not by any means easy to see those that are negative. It is comparatively simple, he means, to read a book and to note what the author says and how he says it. But to observe what he omits to say is a much more difficult task in criticism. We are generally so hurried in our reading, we have hardly time to see the blanks and gaps. We are surprised, when some one calls our attention to them, that we should never have detected the omission. A book is like a congregation in that light. We see who are present at a glance ; but to note the absentees is not so easy.

And the more a writing fascinates and fills us, the less are we able to observe its silences. There are some books, like very sluggish streams, that

leave us abundant time in every backwater. And there are others, swift, hurrying, impetuous, that urge us as on a torrent to the sea. It is these latter that, in their sweeping tide, carry us forward and make us so forgetful. It is only afterwards, as we look back on things, that we awake to De Quincey's negative characteristics.

Now I think that that is true of the four gospels. I question if there are any other books in the whole world where it is harder to be alive to negative features. They are so charged with life, so radiant with love, so rich in action, so instinct with spirit, that we are mastered by that wonderful story, and hardly note its wonderful omissions. We are all familiar with what Jesus said. Do we ever think of what He refused to say? And what Jesus did, we all remember that. Do we ever ponder on what He refused to do? Carlyle says, in the opening chapters of his *Cromwell*, that there is a rich harvest for the man who will study the silences of Cromwell. And what Carlyle says of his Oliver we can say in far deeper senses of our Lord. There is a world of meaning in the silences of Jesus. There is many a royal lesson in His refusals. And it is Christ's refusals,

that negative aspect of His redeeming work, that I want to dwell on for a little this evening.

First, then, let us observe that Jesus sometimes refused to work a miracle. And we shall take that first, because in the gospel story it stands among the first refusals of our Lord. It was in the desert where our Lord was tempted, and Satan came to Him when He was hungry, and he said, 'If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.' And Jesus was filled with the spirit of power at His baptism ; and in the mastership of nature God had given Him, it was but a trifle to convert that stone. Yet never a stone became a loaf that day. 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' Christ's ministry was to be rich in miracle, and He began by refusing to perform one.

And do you see the meaning of that refusal ? It was our Lord refusing for His own use the powers that God had given Him for others. It was for others Jesus Christ was here. He came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister. The day was coming when He would feed five thousand by a miracle. But by a miracle He never fed

Himself. He might have called for the twelve legions of angels, and they would have saved Him from Judas and his rabble. He might have cried to God upon the cross, and God would have delivered Him even then. But He fed others, Himself He would not feed. He saved others, Himself He would not save. And Christ is our brother, Christ is our Redeemer, just because He refused in ways like that.

But again, as we run our thought over the gospel story, we see that Jesus sometimes refused to answer prayer. We read of the Gadarene demoniac to-night: that story that has come like a breath from heaven on twice ten thousand bound and helpless souls. But it is not only a lesson in the power of Jesus, it is a lesson in the art of prayer. For the devils prayed, 'Lord, let us enter the swine': and the devils got the permission that they craved. And the Gadarenes prayed Jesus to depart: and by the morning Jesus had left their country. But the demoniac, cured, clothed, in his right mind, prayed Christ that he might follow Him and serve Him: and that was the only prayer that Christ refused. 'Go home to thy friends,' said Christ, 'and tell

them how great things the Lord hath done for thee.'

And do you catch the meaning of *that* refusal? There was an infinite pity for poor dead Gadara in it. I dare say it almost broke the demoniac's heart. It would have been so exquisitely sweet to follow Christ. But men are saved to serve, not to enjoy, and service like charity begins at home. I picture the gladness of his wife and children. I picture the awe and wonder of the villagers. The mightiest sermon of the holiest preacher could never have told on Gadara like that. It was not in harshness that Jesus Christ refused him. It was in the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom. There were Peter and James and John for Galilee. But God had need of this curate for Decapolis.

And sometimes our prayers are refused like that. Other men seem to get all they want: their slightest wish is gratified. And the one thing we prayed for passionately, and it would have made all the difference in the world to us, —that was the very thing that God refused. It would have been so sweet to have an answer. It seemed so harsh and bitter to be denied. But the stone which the builders refused became the

headstone of the corner. And sometimes it is the prayer that God refuses that leads us to our service and our crown. ‘Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me !’ And the refusal of that prayer has saved the world.

For we are saved to serve. That is the point. No man is redeemed by blood just to be happy. I trust I have been accepted in the Beloved many a day ; but if you must feel like singing all the time to be a Christian, I am a long way from being a Christian yet. It is sickly and exaggerated hymns like that that work such irreparable mischief in the church. I am sure it was not a hymn like that they sang when they went out to the garden of Gethsemane. It is not when you feel like singing all the time, it is when you feel like serving all the time, that you are touched by the resurrection power of Jesus. And the things that I crave for have often to be refused me, in order that I may serve a little better. I fancy Paul would have been the happiest man in Asia if God had taken his thorn in the flesh away. But the thorn was left : Jesus refused his prayer : and how it enriched and sanctified the heart of Paul, and gave him new eyes for God’s sufficient

grace, all that we shall never know till, in the light of the full love of God, we begin to compare our triumphs and our thorns.

But I pass on. For I have noticed that Jesus not only sometimes refused to answer prayer, Jesus sometimes refused to explain. Take for example that scene in Matthew's gospel, where Jesus had cast out the traders from the Temple. And the chief priests and elders came to Him and said, 'By what authority doest thou these things?' There was no denying the power of His deeds. They were too famous now to be gainsaid. But at least they might require His credentials. He must exhibit His parchment, if He is to teach. Then Jesus put to them that question about John : Was his baptism from heaven or of men? And when they could not answer Him, fearing the people, Christ meets their question with a flat refusal. They want to know by what authority, and Jesus simply refuses to explain.

And the reason of that refusal was just this. Had they had eyes to see, and ears to hear, and hearts to feel, they would have found in the very works themselves the countersign and authority of God. The common people needed no explanation. They glorified God when they saw the

works of Jesus. But there are none so blind as those who will not see, and that was just the blindness of the scribes. Had they been truly earnest in their question, I think that Jesus would have explained everything. But the question was one of malice, not sincerity ; it was to find fault, and not to follow, they wanted. And to that spirit Jesus refuses satisfaction. He is always willing to help, to guide, to save. He is not always willing to explain.

Now there are some things Christ can explain to no man. There are eternal issues in the passing moment that our so fragmentary mind can never grasp. We are like gnats trying to understand the sunbeams when we lift our minds to the mysteries of God. But there are other mysteries Christ can explain, and yet they have never been explained to us : and the fault lies not in the brain, but in the heart. Christ is intolerant of idle curiosity. ‘What is that to thee ? follow thou me.’ But if any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God. When a man comes to the gospel as an intellectual problem, he will meet with a thousand difficulties unexplainable. But let him come to it with the heart of a little child, and

step by step he will be guided heavenward. It is to the yielded heart that Christ explains. It is in proportion to the surrender of the life that the mists and the shadows begin to clear away. Christ only commits Himself to those who really commit themselves to Him.

A word on one other refusal, and I am done. It is the refusal of Jesus on the cross to drink the draught that was given Him. 'They gave Him to drink wine mingled with myrrh,' says Mark, 'but He received it not.' That cup, we know, was offered to Christ in mercy. It was prepared for the deadening of pain. It dulled the senses in the hour of torture. And though we shall never know, this side of glory, who mingled it and offered it to the Lord, we know that it was very kindly meant, and I am sure was just as kindly taken. But for all that our Lord refused the cup. Not unkindly, but very firmly and deliberately, He refused it. He had come to suffer. He had come to die. He was bearing now, in all its weight and curse, the burden of the transgression of the world. And if through the agony he was to win man's freedom, and through the suffering draw man to God again, come, agony ! come, suffering, to the uttermost !

no wine mingled with myrrh shall deaden it. In the hour of battle the captain must be awake. And Christ was the captain of our salvation on Calvary. In the last storm and assault, it will not do for the leader to be sleeping. And the crowning assault on sin, and death, and hell, was made by our mighty leader on the cross. He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down on the right hand of God. Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end.

O brethren, try to realise to-night the peerless fidelity of Jesus Christ, from the hour when He refused to turn the stones to bread till the moment when He refused the myrrh upon the cross. If Christ has never won you by His calls, shall He not win you now by His refusals? For every rejection of that man of Nazareth was in the service of a fallen world. He pleased not Himself. You must be hard to please if He does not please you. What ails you, young men and women, at this noble service? What ails you, unsettled heart, at this easy yoke? It is yours to receive, by deed of gift to-night. 'Lord, I believe! Help thou my unbelief!'

LOVE'S WASTEFULNESS

To what purpose is this waste?—Matt. xxvi. 8.

THE scene was Bethany, and the time was near the end. A few more days and the earthly life of Jesus would be over. Jesus and His disciples are seated at their evening meal, when a woman, whom from other sources we learn to have been Mary, did this strange deed that is to live for ever. It is not always true that 'the evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones.' The harm that Mary did, if she did any, lies sleeping with the other gossip of the street of Bethany. This deed still lives, like a choice framework for her heart and hand. 'Tis one of those countless actions of the just, that smell sweet and blossom in the dust.

And the deed, however unforeseen, was very simple. It was the breaking of an alabaster box,

and the pouring of the ointment on the feet of Christ. How much this Mary owed to Jesus, perhaps we shall never know. We cannot tell what a new peace had stolen upon her heart, and what a new glory had fallen upon her world, when first this guest entered her brother's home. But when her brother died, and Jesus came, and called him from the dead, and gave him back to Bethany and to Mary, why then, by any passionate thankfulness we have felt in getting back our kindred from the gates of death, we can touch the fringes of the gratitude of Mary. And that was the motive and meaning of her act. She loved Him so, she could not help it. Christ's love had broken her alienated heart. Now let it break her alabaster box. The best was not too good for Him, Who had given her a new heart and a new home.

But there are deeds so fine that only Christ can understand them. There are some actions so inspired, that even the saintliest disciple, leaning on Jesus' bosom, will never interpret them aright. And this was one of these. Peter, and James, and John—they understand it now, but they did not understand it then.

They were indignant. It was a shocking extravagance of an impulsive woman. What need to squander so a year's wages of a working man —for the ointment never cost a penny less. If it were not needed now for Lazarus, it might have been sold and given to the poor.

You call them narrow? And you are irritated by their lack of insight? Stay, brethren, there were some noble features in their indignation. And had you and I been lying at that table, I almost hope we should have fallen a-fretting too. These men could not forget, even at the feast, the gaunt and horrid form of destitution that sits for ever in the chamber of the village pauper, crying aloud for clothing and for bread. It may be, too, that at their evening worship they had been reading that he who gives to the poor lends to the Lord. And had they not had it from their Master's lips that He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister? Till in the light of that, and in the remembrance of the woes of poverty, their hearts began to burn with a not dishonourable indignation. And each began to ask his fellow, To what purpose is this waste?

But these disciples had forgotten one thing.

They had forgotten that this woman's wastefulness was the native revelation of her love. There is a wasteful spending that is supremely selfish. There is a lavish giving that is disowned in heaven, because the giver is always thinking of himself. But God suspends the pettier economies, and will not brook a single murmur, when He detects the wastefulness of love. It is the genius of love to give. It is love's way to forget self and lavish everything. And Mary's way was love's way when she brake the box and poured the ointment on the feet of Christ. And being love's way, it was God's way too.

And so we reach the truth that I am anxious to press home on your hearts. If God be Love, and if a prodigal expenditure like that of Mary be of the very essence of all love, then in the handiwork of God we shall detect a seeming wastefulness. I scan the works of the Almighty, and everywhere I see the marks of wisdom. I look abroad, and the great universe assures me of His power. But God is more than wisdom or than power. God is Love. And I can never rest till I have found the traces of that love in all I know and all I see of God. Here, then, is

one of love's sure tokens. It is a royal expenditure, a lavish and self-forgetful waste. Can I detect this prodigality in the various handiworks of God?

1. First, then, I turn to Nature. I leave the crowded city, and find my way into the field, and there, amid the hedgerows, under the open sky, I see a prodigality like that of Mary. God has His own arithmetic, it is not ours. God has His own economy, but it is not the economy of man. Things are not measured here and weighed in scales, and nicely calculated and numbered out. The spirit that breathes through universal nature is the spirit that brake the alabaster box. That heather at my feet is flinging off its seeds in such countless millions, that this one patch could cloak the mountain-side in purple. Yon birch that shakes its leaves above my head could fill with seedlings the whole belt of wood. The sun is shining upon dead Sahara as well as on the living world that needs it. And the gentle rain that falls on the mown grass is falling just as sweetly on the granite rock. What mean these myriads of living things? Was He utilitarian Who formed and decked the twice ten thousand creatures who

dance and die upon a summer's eve? Have we not here in primal force the spirit that prompted Mary to her deed? There is a royal extravagance in nature. There is a splendid prodigality. There is a seeming squandering of creative power. Let men believe it is the work of carelessness, or of a dead and iron law; but as for us, we shall discover in it some hint that God is Love, until the day break and the shadows flee away.

Or holding still by nature, let us set the question of beauty in that light. This world is very beautiful, the children sing; and so it is. And the only organ that can appreciate beauty is the eye of man. No lower creature has the sense of beauty. It serves no purpose in the world's economy. Beauty unseen by man is beauty wasted. Yet there are scenes of beauty in the tropics on which the eye of man has never lit. And there are countless flushings of the dawn, and glories unnumbered of the setting sun, that never fall within the ken of man. Arctic explorers tell us that in the distant north there is an unsurpassable glory in the sunset. For a brief season in declining day the levels of the snow are touched with gold, and every minaret

of ice is radiant. And every sunset has been so for centuries, and never an eye has looked on it till now. O seeming waste of precious beauty! Until the heart begins to whisper, 'Why, to what purpose is this waste?' Ah! it is there! that is the point. We have observed it now in the Creator's work.

2. But now I turn to Providence. If Mary's action was in the line of God's, we should detect even in providence something of the prodigality of love.

When aged Jacob sat in his tent in Canaan, nursing the hope that Joseph still was living, he would have been content to have had his son again though he came home in rags. And when the prodigal of the parable came hirpling home, ashamed of himself, and sorry for his sin, he wished no better chamber than his father's kitchen. But God was lavish in his loving-kindness, and gave a prince and not a beggar back to Jacob. And the father of the prodigal was himself so prodigal of love that he must put a ring upon that truant hand and bind the shoes upon these wandering feet.

Now do not say all that was long ago. And

do not think the God of providence has changed. Here and to-day, in every heart and home, He is still working with lavish prodigality. O brother, what opportunities the God of providence has squandered upon you ! Come, to what purpose is this waste ?—unsaved heart, you tell me that. Justice would long ago have settled things. Nothing but love could ever be so lavish in letting down from heaven these opportunities. And when I think of all the gifts of God that seem to be given only to be wasted ; of sight that might have seen so much, and sees so little, and that little vile ; of speech that might have done such noble things, and does so little, and that little mean ; of hearing and of memory, of thought and of imagination, lavished so royally on worthless men ; then dimly I realise the prodigality of providence, and feel my hopeless debt, and the hopeless debt of all this fallen world, to the seeming wastefulness of Him who quickened Mary to her wasteful deed.

3. So, in the realm of nature and in the sphere of providence, we have observed a spirit akin to Mary's. But in the world of grace it is clearer still. Indeed, when Jesus said that Mary's deed

was always to be coupled with His death, He must have recognised that the two were kin.

Now think : the death of Jesus is sufficient to pardon all the sins of every man. Why do we make a universal offer, and why do we carry the Gospel to the heathen, if we are not convinced of that? Yes, 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life.' There is no soul so sunk in England, nor any heart so ignorant in Africa, but turning may be saved. And all the teeming millions of the continents, coming to Jesus Christ for mercy, could never exhaust the merits of His blood.

But tell me, brother, are these millions coming? And do you really believe that the whole world is being saved to-night? Are there not multitudes for whom life's tragedy is just the might have been? And souls unnumbered, here and everywhere, galloping down to the mist and mire? And there was room within the heart of Christ for all! And there was cleansing in the Saviour's death for every one! O waste! waste! waste! And to what purpose is that wasted agony? And why should Jesus suffer and die for all, if all were

never to accept His love? Ah, Mary, why didst thou break the alabaster box and pour the precious ointment upon Christ? That prodigality was just the Saviour's spirit that brought Him to the cross and to the grave. Love gives and lavishes and dies, for it is love. Love never asks how little can I do; it always asks how much. There is a magnificent extravagance in love, whether the love of Mary or the love of God.

If, therefore, you believe that God is Love, if you take Love as the best name of the Invisible, then, looking outwards to the world and backwards to the cross, you can never ask again, To what purpose is this waste? If you do that, come, over with the love as well, and go and find a calculating god who is not lavish because he does not love. Find him! and be content! Only beware! be self-consistent! Never look more for strength when you are down. Never look more for help when you are weary. Never expect a second chance when you have squandered one. Seek not for any sympathy in sorrow, or any fellowship of love in loneliness. And never dream that you will find the Christ. Come, will that do for you, young men and women? And

will that do for you, housewife or business man? You want the loving arm and voice of God. You want the loving ministry of Christ. You, poor rebellious and staggering heart, are lost but for the lavish scattering of a love that never wearies, and will not let you go. And I believe that that is mine in Jesus, and I believe that that is yours. Claim it and use it. And when you see that love breaking the alabaster box, ask not the meaning of that waste again.

REVERENCE

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.¹—Rev. i. 17.

JOHN was a prisoner in the isle of Patmos when he had this revelation of Jesus Christ. He had been banished thither because he was a Christian ; and if the early legends can be trusted, he was condemned to the hard slavery of the Patmos mines. But sweet are the uses of adversity. There are some things we cannot learn in Babylon that become plain to us in sea-girt Patmos. There are some sights we are blind to in the markets : our eyes are only opened in the mines. It was not at home that Jacob had his Bethel : it was in the hills, a wanderer, and alone. It was not at Pharaoh's court that Moses saw Jehovah in the burning bush : it was when flying from Pharaoh in the desert. It was not in peaceful days that Stephen saw heaven opened, and

¹ I am indebted for guidance and suggestion to a sermon by Liddon in his volume *Easter in St. Paul's*.

Jesus standing at the right hand of God: it was in the hour of martyrdom. And this vision of Jesus, the alpha and omega, the first and last, whose head and hairs were white as snow, and whose eyes were as a flame of fire,—this vision came to John an exile in the mines. ‘It is adversity,’ says Bacon in his priceless essays, ‘which carrieth the greater benediction, and the clearer revelation of God’s favour.’

Now there are many lessons in this story. An old and fragrant commentary that I opened on the chapter rises into a height of eloquence that we have lost, over these eyes that were like a flame of fire. But I want to centre on one point to-night. I want to take this falling-down of John as a true instance of a truly reverent spirit. John saw, John worshipped, John adored. And we are living in a world that’s full of God, and we have something better than a vision, we have the word of prophecy. And do we stand or fall upon our faces, and are we reverent or are we not? that is the question.

I do not think that the most cheerful optimist would dare to assert this was a reverent age. Of course we shall always have some reverent men

always some reverent souls in every congregation ; but reverence is not a note of modern life : still worse, it is not a desire. There was a time when to be thought reverent was an honourable thing. Now, to be thought reverent is almost to be old-fashioned. Men want to be smart and clever and successful, and somehow reverence does not agree well with these. We are all busy : few of us are reverent. Yet without reverence life is a shallow thing, and true nobility of character is impossible ; and without reverence we shall be strangers to the end to all that is best and worthiest in religion.

Can we explain the comparative absence of this grace ? I think we can. It springs from certain features of our modern life, and the first of these is the wear and hurry of it. It is no chance that the most reverent hour in Moses' life was in the desert. It is no accident that John fell down as dead, not in the streets of Babylon, but in the isle of Patmos. It was no whim, though it seems whimsical to us, that the prophet of reverence¹ whom we lost a week ago should have denounced our crowded city life. It is not easy for an overdriven man to keep a reverent heart.

¹ Ruskin.

It is very hard to feel perpetual reverence when life for thousands is a perpetual rush. When I go fast enough travelling by train, castles and towns and woods and battlefields flash for an instant and are by, and the great things are but little for the speed. So in the rush of life, worrying, leisureless, the great things of the soul and of the universe are dwarfed, and it is hard to be a reverent man. There is a certain leisure needed for the cultivation of a truly reverent spirit, a certain inward quietness, a certain detachment from the present day. Yet mark, that leisure is a thing of heart and not of hours. Some of our hardest toilers, who never enter a church door, it may be, are far more reverent, and being more reverent are better men, than many a church-goer who never felt the awe of things, and never fell down at His feet as dead.

The lack of reverence too, I cannot doubt, is partly due to the spirit of inquiry of to-day. God knows that if to be reverent meant to be ignorant, some of us, in the eagerness to know, would say farewell to reverence for ever. I ask the students here if the keenest inquirer they ever had to teach them was not as reverent and humble as a

little child. We had three great professors in my day at Glasgow, men known in every academy in Europe—the one for Greek, the other for medicine, the third for natural philosophy—and only to hear them was to be reminded of Sir Isaac Newton, who felt like a little child picking some pebbles from the shore and casting them into the infinite ocean of the truth. Still, for all that, it is the truth that an inquisitive age is rarely reverent. And of all inquisitive and critical times, I fancy we have fallen on the worst. We are all eager : few of us are reverent. We are never afraid to criticise, but we have almost forgotten to adore. We can discuss these seven golden candlesticks, and trace the sources of the vision in Daniel, and smile at the strange mixing of the metaphors ; but ‘when I saw Him,’ says John, ‘I fell at His feet as dead.’

But this present lack of reverence has another source : it is the dying-out from heart and conscience of the fear of God. ‘Ah, Rogers,’ said Dr. Dale of Birmingham to his old friend,—‘ah, Rogers, no one fears God now.’ And there can be little question that in the largest senses Dale was right. Man’s views of God have changed in

the past century. It was the Sovereignty of God that was the watchword once. It is the Fatherhood of God that is the watchword now. And no man can quarrel with that change of emphasis, when we remember how it has flashed new light upon the love of God, and kindled into meaning many a page and parable. But things are not right if we can only love God more by reverencing Him less. And who can doubt that something of the majesty, and something of the grandeur, and something of the awesome fear of God is gone, in this reiterated insistence on His Fatherhood? I sometimes think God had a special purpose in giving us the Old Testament in our Bible. With all its difficulties, I feel it was preserved to counteract a natural tendency of man. For God in the Gospel comes so very near us, and the love of God shown in the love of Jesus is so brotherlike, that only to realise it is to run the danger of forgetting reverence and growing very familiar with God. And it takes all the psalms and all the prophets, with their magnificent gospel of a Sovereign God, to make us fall down at His feet as dead. O living Spirit, open our eyes and give us back again

something of the fear of God! For we shall never love or serve Thee well till we have learned to reverence Thee more!

Now what is reverence? It has been variously defined, but perhaps the old definition is the best. It is the practical recognition of true greatness. It is my attitude of heart and mind when I am confronted by the truly worthy and the truly great. It does not matter of what kind the greatness is: it may be the greatness of my brother's character, it may be the greatness of this mysterious world, or it may be the greatness of Almighty God; but the moment I see it, feel it, and recognise my place, I am a reverent man.

And that is the condemnation of the irreverent man. He may be clever, but he is always shallow. He may be smart, but he is blind. To live in a universe like this, and to find nothing to reverence, is to condemn, not the world, but myself. Irreverent men are often amusing, and are always selfish. For not to see and feel what is sublime, and not to be touched by what is truly great, is a true token of a selfish heart. The other side of reverence is humility. The other side of irreverence is pride. It is the curse of the irreverent

heart, that underneath all lightness and all jest it is a stranger to the humility of Jesus.

Now where does individual irreverence begin? I think that generally it begins at home. When I have ceased to reverence myself, it is the hardest thing in the whole world to reverence my brother man, to reverence God. If I am mean, I shall read meanness in my neighbour's heart. If I am selfish, I shall find selfishness in the most Christlike thing my neighbour ever did. We all get as we bring. If there be nothing great in you, no hope, no ideal, you pay the penalty by finding the world mean. If there be any glimmering of greatness in you, and any passion for righteousness and God, it is wonderful what a grand world this grows, and what new worth we find in other men, and what a majesty we see in God. I think it was this that made the poet put into the mouth of Guinevere—

O shut me round with narrowing nunnery walls,
Meek maidens, from the voices crying 'shame.'
I must not scorn myself.

Now there are two things in the life of Jesus that arrest me. And the first of these is His reverence for God. Jesus knew God as God

was never known on earth before. God was His Father in far deeper senses than He is yours or mine. His intimacy with His Father was complete. He was at home with God. Yet nothing can match the perfect reverence of Christ towards this Father He knew and loved so well. I can always speak of Jesus' fellowship with God. It is a misuse of language to speak of Jesus' familiarity with God. There is an awe and reverence in all the recorded intercourse of Jesus with His Father, that is as wonderful as His perfect trust.

But still more arresting than the reverence of Jesus for His God is the reverence that Jesus had for man. Sometimes you reverence a man because you do not know him well; you get to know him better, and your reverence dies. Christ knew men thoroughly. Christ knew men through and through,—their thoughts, their hopes, their fears, their weaknesses, their struggles, and their passions. Christ saw each sin more deadly and each vice more horrible than the most tender conscience in its most tender hour had ever dreamed of. If you had seen what Christ had seen, you would have spurned your brother. If you had known what Jesus knew, you would have

spat on him. The wonder is Christ reverenced him still, still thought it worth His while to teach him, still thought man great enough to live for, still thought man great enough to die for. There never was a reverence so loving, there never was a love so sweetly reverent, as the love of Jesus Christ for you and me, fallen men, yet still in our ruin not without tokens of a heavenly greatness and of the God who made us in His image!

So as I think on reverence, and link it with the supreme reverence of Jesus, I learn three lessons that may guide *us* to a more reverent life.

And first, if we are ever to grow reverent again, we must know more. The reverence of ignorance is gone. Half-knowledge is irreverent: a fuller knowledge will make us reverent again. Jesus was reverent because His knowledge was perfect: we are irreverent because our knowledge is shallow. When we know *man*, far off, as Jesus knew him, we shall find something to reverence in our meanest brother. When we know *God* as Jesus knew Him, we shall adore. And is that knowledge possible to me? Thank God, through

daily fellowship with Christ, I may follow on to know the Lord.

And then, if we are ever to grow reverent again, we must trust more. If John had never trusted Christ, he never would have seen the vision and never would have fallen at Jesus' feet as dead. I cannot reverence a *man* whom I distrust, I cannot reverence a *God*. It wants deep faith to make me reverent. It wants a perfect faith like Jesus had to make me perfectly reverent like Him. I never can be noble without reverence. I never can be reverent without faith.

And if we are ever to grow reverent again, we must love more. There never was a time when so much was spoken and written about Christian love. If we loved more, and said less about it, we might revive our dying reverence. O what a deal of our so-called love to Jesus is spurned and scouted by an infinite God because the feeling of reverence is not in it. It is so easy to talk of leaning on Jesus' bosom. It is so easy to forget that he who leaned on Jesus' bosom fell down at Jesus' feet as dead. I plead for more love, not to increase, but to remove that light familiarity that blots our Christian service. For love reveals,

love sees, love breaks the bars, love reads the secrets both of man and God. And when I have seen my brother's secret story, and when I have seen into the deep things of God, I never can be irreverent again.

WORK AND PLAY

And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing
in the streets thereof.—Zech. viii. 5.

IT was of an earthly city this prophet was mainly thinking. His heart was intent upon a rebuilt Jerusalem. But just as Abraham, behind the earthly Canaan that God promised him, caught gleams of a mystical land beyond the stars, so Zechariah, back of the visible Jerusalem, had his vision of the unseen Jerusalem of heaven. I have no sympathy with that narrow view of prophecy that binds it to definite moments and particular names. I do not think that any event in time can exhaust the significance of a true prophet's speech. There is something illimitable, infinite, in prophecy. There is a vision that pierces the accidental, and sees the everlasting, elements. There may be a thousand partial fulfilments, of none of which, perhaps, the

prophet dreamed ; until at last, in the full light of God, we understand what inspiration is.

Now it makes heaven a very homelike place to think that boys and girls are playing there. It brings the eternal city very near us to think of the laughter of children in the streets. ‘When I was a boy,’ a great divine has told us,—‘when I was a boy, I thought of heaven as a great shining city with vast walls and domes and spires, and with nobody in it except white angels, who were strangers to me. But by and by my little brother died, and I thought of a great city with walls and domes and spires and a flock of cold unknown angels, and one little fellow I was acquainted with. He was the only one I knew there at that time. And then another brother died, and there were two that I knew. And I forgot about the domes and spires and palaces, for heaven was becoming homelike now.’ O sorrowing parents, your little child is playing there to-night, where there is no more curse, where there is no more death, where sorrow and sighing have quite fled away. It is very true that there’s a crown, a song, a harp, for little children. But there’s something else and even

better than that. There's a game for little children above the bright blue sky ; and in the light of God, and under the eye of Jesus, and in the sunlit spaces where the angels are, the boys and girls are playing it to-night.

And so we get our keynote for this evening, for I want to talk a little about play. And I shall set play in a threefold light : 1. In the light of work. 2. In the light of the Gospel. 3. In the light of heaven. And may our thoughts be worthier when we are done than they are now.

First, then, let me set play in the light of work. Now, what is the difference between work and play ? At first glance it seems a foolish question. When I think of the tired worker at the loom, from six till six, week in week out, summer and winter ; and when I compare that with the merry romping of the children, there seems to be a world between the two. But take another instance. Here is a rural postman, let me say. And every afternoon he has to make that round, he has to cross that common, he has to pass these villages, and it is six or eight miles ere he gets home. That is his work. But every

afternoon for exercise some college student follows the postman's steps, makes the same round, crosses the same common, and it is six or eight miles till he gets home. And yet for the postman the afternoon was work, and for the student the afternoon was play.

You see, then, at a glance that it is not in the things we do so much that the real difference between work and play is found: it is in the spirit in which the thing is done. It is true there is some play that never by any chance could become work. And there is work so galling, wearing, killing, that all the music of heaven could not make it play. But these are limits, poles; and between these there are ten thousand activities in human life, and to one man they may be work and to another play, according to the spirit that is in them. And can we distinguish that difference of spirit? I do not suppose that it was ever better done than by that great thinker and poet, Horace Bushnell. 'Work,' he said, 'is activity for an end, and play is activity as an end'; and if we think on that, we shall find the depth of it. For it means that in work we are seeking for some-

thing that lies outside our work ; it may be money, it may be rank, it may be rest. And it means that in play we forget everything except our play, and all we seek and search for in our play lies in the bosom of the play itself. In other words, back of our work is duty, back of our work is hunger, back of it is constraint. But back of play, there is no force like that. It is the flight of the swallow. It is the welling of the spring. It is the music of the full tides of being. It is the artless carolling of love and freedom. It is labour, but in the labour there is liberty. It is work, but in the work there is my life !

Such, then, is play set in the light of work ; and I have dwelt on it briefly and with a reluctant hand, for there is nothing of the Gospel in all that. And time is flying and the hours are precious, and we have hardly touched the hem of His garment yet. Pass, then, from play set in the light of work, and let us view it in the light of the Gospel now.

Well, I think we will all admit that we owe to Christ the dignity of labour. If a man can work with his hands and be a man ; if a man

can work with his hands and hold his head up ; if a man can fight his way up from the ranks and take his place with the highest in the land, we owe these honourable possibilities to that religion whose Founder wrought in a carpenter's shop, and whose chief apostle was a tent-maker. All are agreed on that. It is the Gospel of Christ that dignified our toil.

But tell me, did you ever think of this, that the Gospel of Jesus has dignified our play ? Yet the one is just as true as is the other. I do not speak of the elevation of amusements, though it is true that wherever Christ is king, a breath of heaven sweeps through our holiday. I mean that, in the Gospel view of man, there is such compass, there is such wisdom, there is such compassion, that the element of play comes to its own again. I have read of that great saint Borromeo, that while engaged with some friends in a game of chess, the question was started what they would do if they knew that they were to die within the hour. 'I would go on with my game,' replied Borromeo. And that is the true spirit of the Master. Even a game of chess can be illumined, brought into line with

the great purposes of life, and made to echo with the praise of God.

And I cannot wonder at that if Jesus is Creator, for the great universe is full of play. As one has said, there is a play-element in things. We build our locomotive engines, and we light our fires, and with infinite jolt and dust and headache we hurry out trainfuls at sixty miles an hour. And we turn round then and shake each other's hands, and we say what a wonderful being man is when a railway train is his work. And all the time, with an infinite velocity, this world is whirling, rushing throughout space, and never a child is wakened from its cradle, and never a dewdrop is shaken from its bed; yet who so simple now as to look up and say what a wonderful being God is, when a world's career is but His finger's play! Do you think it is a mere figure of speech that we talk of the waters playing on the shore, or of the wind playing among the trees, or of the sunlight playing on the grass? These words are real, penetrative. I would feel at once I was adrift from truth if I talked of the wind working among the trees. For the creative work of the Infinite is

play. It is not taskwork. It is the outcome of love, of liberty, of superabundant, ever-lasting life. And hence the joy and beauty of the world. And hence the irresistible conviction, witnessed inhuman speech, of the play-element in the handiwork of God.

And I think the Gospel was bound to recognise our play when it recognised so lovingly the little child. 'Except ye become as little children,' said the Master, 'ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God,' and I cannot think of the children without play. There is something wrong when the voices cease to shout. There goes a strange pang through the mother's heart when the little feet daily are too tired to romp. I remember once in London seeing two little waifs huddled together upon the doorstep of a gin-palace. It was late at night and it was very rainy, and I know not what curse and mockery of motherhood had brought them there. But into the square there came a great street-organ, and every corner and alley rang with its riotous music, and rags and rain were forgotten in a twinkling, and the little pair—arms linked—were dancing and tripping it with feet as light

as angels. There is always the instinct of play within the child. Buried and crushed and cursed, it is still there. And except we become as little children, we cannot enter the kingdom of God. O heart crushed with excessive work! O life with the spring gone, and the child-spirit dead, and nothing but the dull round to-morrow, so that even a holiday is dead to you! Jesus has come to give life more abundant, to fill the deeps of heart and soul with God, until the dreariest task a man is set to, and the heaviest burden a man is called to bear, are lit with such an everlasting hope, and radiant with such a mystery of love, that the spirit of a child comes back again, and the soul plays like the sunshine and the children do!

But time is almost gone, and I must say a word before we separate on play in the light of heaven.

Now tell me, what is your first thought of heaven? I am sure that for most of us here to-night, the first thing that we think of heaven is rest. So many men are overdriven now. So many women are terribly overworked. If they ever think about heaven at all, the sweetest thought of it for them is this, that it will be

an eternity of rest. And do you really think it will be that? And do you really think that you will *want* that? Consider.

Your little boy came home from school on Friday. And he was very tired with lessons and running, and when bed-time came, how fast asleep he fell; and you stooped down and looked at him and kissed him, and perhaps a tear fell on his cheek, you know not why. And you said, 'Poor laddie, he was utterly worn out, he needed rest.' And then dawns Saturday, and the voices of a new day are calling him, and his muscles are strong again, and his brain is quick, and he is up and out and romping with the merriest. Last night it was rest he wanted, but it is play this morning.

So for us all there comes the Friday night. Our week of school is done. God's discipline is over. We lay aside our pencils and our books. And we are wearied with the stress of it, and we are tired with the pain of it, and we cry out, 'O God, to be at rest!' And so we fall asleep; and it may be that on us, as on our children, some tears fall. Then dawns the Saturday, the everlasting Sabbath, and we awake, and Jesus Christ

is there. And every faculty is full of being, and every part is wondrously expanded ; and we are quivering, inspired with life, and we do not want to rest: we want to serve, and the service of eternity is play ! For here we must be driven to service, but yonder to serve will be our very joy. And here we are so sinful, service is irksome work ; but yonder, glorified, it will be like play. O blessed Saviour, through whose five wounds we have that shining hope, we bow our hearts to Thee ! We would be Thine !

THE LAND OF HILLS AND VALLEYS

But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys.—Deut. xi. 11.

IT is to be noted how often God tells Israel that the land they were making for was their possession. He wants it to be graven on every heart that their new country was to be their very own. In Egypt they had possessed nothing; they were possessed. The food they ate, the cottages they slept in, were not theirs. Their time, their children, their lives were not their own in Egypt. But the country they were marching to *was* to be theirs. They would be slaves of a tyranny no more. It was the land whither they were going to possess it.

And every man who is living his life well is marching forward in the track of Israel. There is a sense in which we all begin by being possessed; but we shall end, God helping us, possessing. Sometimes it is a foolish ambition that possesses

us ; sometimes it is a hereditary curse ; or it is habit, or sloth, or cowardice, or passion ; and we are not our own. But when God breaks that bondage of the soul, far off, it may be, but gleaming in the morning, we see the peaks of a land that shall be ours. We are not to be mastered as we were in Egypt. We are called to liberty, not to be Pharaoh's plaything. So gradually, not without many a failure, through daily effort and daily prayer and watching, we come to a country where we are not slaves but kings. Once, whether for better or for worse, we were possessed ; but now with patience we possess our souls.

You will note, too, that these marching Israelites had been told what the land was to be like in outline. It was to be a land of hills and valleys. God had told them that. How high the hills would be, they did not know. Would they be ragged mountains, wild-tossed with slabs and boulders ; or gentle slopes mantled with the green grass ? They did not know. And they did not know there would be a Tabor there. They had never heard there would be a Calvary. These things were shrouded in the impenetrable dark.

But they knew the broad outline of the country. God gave them a sketch-plan long before they reached it ; but it took years, took ages, to fill out the plan, and to say that this is Tabor where Jesus was transfigured, and yonder is Calvary where Jesus died.

And do you say that the future is all hidden ? There is a deep sense in which that is true. The separate secrets of these coming days are lodged and locked in the eternal intellect. But there is an outline of the coming year that God makes plain to every child of man. For what your past has been, and what your God has been, and what your heart is eager for to-night—all that will map out the New Year for you. It is only men who separate the years.¹ It is only men who ring these bells at midnight, and play the fool with the drunkard's bottle. Did any one of the twice ten million stars twinkle the brighter when the new century rang in ? But they carried into it the will of God, and the powerful impress of the Hand Divine, and I shall trust them for to-morrow's to-morrow because I have known their faithfulness to-day. How is

¹ Preached on the first Sunday of 1901.

your heart to-night? that is the question. What is the deepest longing of your life? You tell me that; and though I cannot name your hills and valleys, I see the outline of your country, brother, and I know what another year will mean for you.

You will note, too, there was to be no monotony in their new home. I am not leading you, says God, to a monotonous land: I am leading you to a land of hills and valleys. The monotony of Egypt had been terrible: the monotony of the wilderness was worse. That burning sand, those rocks, these stunted shrubs, daily, unceasingly, and at night, loneliness:—it was no wonder Israel lost heart. But the land yonder was a land of hills and valleys. It would be ever fresh with endless charm. Every valley would have its rushing stream, and every ridge would have its separate vista. There might be difficulties there, and dangers, but there could never be monotony.

And is there ever monotony where God conducts? I do not think so: I certainly never found it. It is a lie to say that being good takes all the charm and colour out of life. In the long-run it is our sins that grow monotonous: our graces are dew-bespangled till the end. Why is there such

an eagerness for any new excitement? Why do men tire so quickly of one pleasure and rush to another, if it is only new? It is a confession of that dead monotony that, sooner or later, falls on the godless life. But wherever duty is, there there is freshness; and wherever there is moral struggle, there is romance; and wherever there is God, there is eternal morning. And however monotonous, friend, your work may be, hour in and hour out, at the loom, behind the desk, if the presence of the Infinite God be with you, and the days are dotted with infinitesimal triumphs, your year shall never be a dead Sahara, but a varied land of hill and vale.

And we want to guard heaven against that monotony too. We want to remember that the spiritual Canaan, like the Canaan that was before the Israelites, is a land of hills and valleys. O brother, there will be endless monotony in hell, but there will never be monotony in heaven; and we want to have deeper thoughts of the beyond than the sounding harp and the unending chorus. Heaven is life's last expansion: heaven is to love and know: heaven is to be what here I struggle towards; and so long as there is charm in vivid life

and growing knowledge and ever-deepening love, so long there shall be variety in heaven. There is a wearisome monotony in the long watches of the night: there shall be no night there. There is a sad monotony in the levels of the sea: there shall be no more sea.

Again, I wonder how long it took the Israelites to learn that the hills were necessary to the valleys. How sweet and fertile the valleys were, they knew. Life was a joy down by these happy meadows; it was a sweet music, that of the rustling corn. But yonder, towering skyward, were the hills, and the brigands were there, and over them, who could tell what tribes there were? And there was an element of tempest too, a spirit of storm, that slumbered among the hills; and sometimes it awoke, and, like an invisible legion, swept the valleys. And the children said life would be perfect here, if God had but spared us these barren and baneful hills. But halt! these rushing brooks, where did they come from? Out of the hills, and down from the snow-clad heights. And where were the sharp sea-winds that would have blighted the vine and withered the springing corn? It was the barrier of mountains that kept them off. And the children said,

We hate these ragged hills, and we wish that God would level them to the ground ;—and it was when they grew to men and women that they knew that never a vine would have clustered in the hollows, and never a harvest turned golden in the valleys, but for the mountains that they wished away.

Is there nothing in your life you wish away? Is there no cross, no trial, no limitation? Do you not think it would be far easier to be good if *that* were different? if he, if she, were dead? If it were any easier to be good, it would hardly be worth while being good at all. It is so easy to be bad, I should suspect my goodness if it came to me pleasantly like what is vile. To be good is hard, and being hard is noble. To be bad is easy, and being easy is cowardly. And the very features, brother, that you wish away, the things that rise and shut the prospects out, I take it that these things in the infinite wisdom of the Creator have been set there, like the everlasting hills, to give you some little harvest in the valley. Do not then quarrel with the hills, my sister. Do not be angry because they shut you in. Fret not. Accept them. Is there no lily of the valley at your feet? It would never have been there but for the hills.

But the valley does not always speak of harvest. It is not always ringing with the vineyard-dresser's lilt. There are valleys in Scripture that are dark with shadow, haunts of depression, images of death. There are valleys in which we catch the sound of weeping, and see the rolling mist and never the sunlight. And it is then that we need this text graven upon our heart: 'The land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys.'

For in the valleys we sometimes forget the hills. In the hour of mist, we forget that the sun was ever shining. You would think there had never been any blue sky at all, we are so utterly disheartened in the cloudy day. I have known men who have had years of health, and a happy hearth, and all the angel ministries of children, and a single week off business and in bed,—and they were so fretted and worried they could hardly pray. Are the stars not there though the clouds are abroad to-night? Are the hills not rising heavenward and Godward, though I am in the valley of the shadow? Yet you are almost convinced, despondent heart, that God has forgotten to be gracious. Recall the hours of vision on the mount. I will lift up my eyes unto the

hills, said David, from whence in the valley of Baca comes mine aid. It makes me strong in the valley to think of that.

And is the other proposition not as true? Are we not prone to forget the valleys when on the hills? It is one of the wonders of the life of Jesus that He never did. I see Him transfigured upon the summit of Tabor. Literally, mystically, it is a moment on the mount. And He talks with Moses and Elias of His *death*. He has not forgotten the valley of the shadow.

My strong, bright, radiant friend, it is just because we want you to be Christlike that I ask you to remember the valley when on the hill. To stand on the hill-top is an exquisite joy. There is vision in it: there is the birth of song. And to be strong and vigorous, with a firm grip of oneself and of one's work, that is like heaven begun. Only remember the day of the valley is coming: the shadow and mist and parting, they are coming; and the wise man, though not with noise and fuss, will be quietly preparing upon the hills for that.

And do you ask what that preparation is? Ah, friend, you have heard it all a hundred times. It is to look by faith upon a crucified Saviour.

It is daily to conquer self to the glory of God. It is to begin again, and begin again, and begin again, ten thousand times, for perseverance is ten thousand beginnings. It is to be charitable, it is to be humble, it is to be self-forgetful, and all in the strength and in the spirit of Jesus. And it is when all is done, to feel and cry, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' Is that your aim? Then you are Christ's, and Christ is God's, and the land whither thou goest to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, but for this New Year and for ever shall be a land of hills and valleys.

UNWARRANTABLE INTERFERENCES

If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on Him.—John xi. 48.

THERE was a sense in which the Pharisees were entirely wrong. Historically, and in the sovereign will of God, it is just because the Pharisees did not let Christ alone that we believe and worship Him to-night. Had they let Christ alone, I speak with reverence, there had been no Calvary for Jesus. And had Jesus never been lifted up on Calvary, He never would have drawn all men to Him. They were quite wrong, then, these Pharisees, in one sense. Their interference was a predestined thing. They plotted and schemed and compassed the death of Jesus. And they said, That ends it, none will believe Him now. Yet the King in his beauty, for twice ten thousand hearts, is the crucified Redeemer still.

But if there was one sense in which the Pharisees were wrong, there was another sense

in which they were entirely right. With a meaning they never saw it was quite true: 'if we let Him alone, all men will believe on Him.' For Pharisaism is not only a sect. It is a spirit. It is living still, disguised, perhaps, but unchanged. And if a sinful world is to believe on Jesus, if men and women are to see His majesty and hail Him as Redeemer, and adore, it is a new sight of the King himself we want: the Pharisee must leave the Christ alone. Truth unadorned is then adorned the most. And 'I am the way, the truth, the life,' said Jesus. I would that many a commentator, many a dogmatist, many a highly intellectual preacher even, had learned that simple lesson from our text: 'If we let Him alone, all men will believe on Him.' For there is a charm, a constraining beauty about Jesus, that draws like a magnet the wandering hearts of men. But tampering hands have been laid upon the Lord. He has been shrouded, hidden, removed from the garden of humanity, till many a simple soul can only cry with Mary, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.'

And so I am led to our central thought for

to-night. It is the Bible thought of letting alone, and I wish to treat it in a Biblical way. First, then, we shall fix our minds on this: there are times when we must leave God alone.

Now the strange thing is—and I call it strange, though to the man who knows his Bible it is quite familiar—the strange thing is, that the times when we must leave God alone are not the times when God appears to wish it. Go back to the story of Exodus, for instance. Recall that sad scene of the golden calf. The people made their idol and they danced around it: and they played the harlot and forgot God around it, till the anger of God was like a scorching flame. And what did God cry to Moses? ‘Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, that I may consume them.’ And Moses simply refused to let God be—fell on his face, entreated passionately, saved the people, and was never more Christlike than in that splendid disobedience. Or take the cry of the Syrophœnician woman, ‘Lord, save my daughter, save my daughter, Lord !’ And if the silence of Christ meant anything at all, and if His word about the lost sheep of the house of Israel meant anything at all, it meant, ‘Let Me alone.’ But

her mother's heart refused to let Christ alone. She pleaded, she parried, she found a choice argument in His refusal, till Christ was mastered by that most disobedient persistency, and she went home to find her daughter healed.

I think you see now what the lesson is. O brother, with a life to live and with a death to die, never let God alone in prayer. 'Let me alone,' the God of science is crying, 'for I work by my inexorable laws, and I shall not change them at my creature's bidding.' 'Let me alone,' the God of providence is crying, 'for your neighbour yonder has not prayed for years, and is he not a happier man than you?' But I take sides with Moses and that woman. And if new depth, new insight, new power for the little self-denials of every day, new craving for holiness, new humility—if these things rise in me as the tide rises, come to me like a bird upon the wing, I shall thank God that I have learned the lesson of never letting Him alone in prayer.

That, then, is one sphere where the earnest heart cannot leave God alone. And I have thought it right to touch on that, to safeguard our topic from abuse. But there is another sphere where God

is sovereign. It is the sphere of action. It is the realm of life. And there it is wisdom, it is peace, just to let God alone to have His way with you. I suppose there never was a general, not even Lord Roberts, who was more loved by his soldiers than the Viscount de Turenne, who was marshal of France in the time of the great Louis. It was he who, if he gained a battle, used to write *we* won, and if his army were defeated, wrote *I* lost. Well, I have read how one night, going the round of his camp, he overheard some of the younger soldiers bitterly murmuring at the discomforts of the march. And an old veteran just recovering from a wound was saying, 'You do not know our father. When you are older, you will never talk like that. Be sure he has some grand end in view that we cannot make out, or he would never allow us suffer so.' And brave Turenne, who tells the story himself, used to say that that moment of eavesdropping was the proudest and happiest moment of his life. The young men were bitter and angry at his leadership. Things would be different if they were in command. But the old veterans who had fought with their general in many a field, and

marched with their general many a weary mile,— they let him alone because they loved him so.

Do that with God, my brother. It is one secret of a strenuous life. The deepest philosophy comes to its crown in that. I have known young men curse when they fell ill. I have known fathers whose hearts turned hard as adamant when the angel of death stooped down and kissed their children. They are the raw recruits in life's great army, and they cannot let their General alone. But the trained soldier trusts him, believes in a life-plan that he cannot see, and prays for submission to the will of God, though the cup be bitter and the cross be sore. O follower of Christ, let God alone. Perhaps it is kinder to bring the rod upon thy back than to put the jewelled ring upon thy finger. He has a path for thee. He has a plan for thee. He has a heaven for thee. Watch, wait, co-operate, accept, but do not insolently interfere.

I believe, too, that there is a wider sense in which we are called to let God alone. For I am conscious in the religious life of our time of a certain fretful anxiety and unrest, and the absence of a quiet and solemn dignity that gave a grandeur

to our fathers' piety. I am amazed, indeed, to note how men and women can be engaged for years in so-called Christian service, and it never seems to dignify their characters, and never lifts them an inch above the world, and never sweetens their so unkindly tongue. Do you remember Uzzah? Do you remember how the ark of God on the new cart was jolted and shaken by Nachon's threshing-floor? And Uzzah, in terror lest the ark should fall, put out his hand, took hold of it, and steadied it. And the anger of God was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there, and he died. Happy for Uzzah had he let God alone! And the spirit of Uzzah is abroad to-day. There is an irreligious anxiety for God. And while I thank Him for all loyal service, and praise Him for all consecrated hands, I want men to believe the ark is holy, and I want men to believe that God is sovereign, and I want a little of the reverence, and of the wonder, and of the awe brought back again, that befit the creature serving his reigning King.

But I pass on. For if there are times when we must leave God alone, there are times when we must let men alone. And that is our second

thought to-night: there are times when we must let men alone.

And here again, as was the case with God, these times are rarely the times when men would like it. The very hour when a man cries to be let alone may be the very hour when I dare not do so. The Bible is full of instances of that. One notable one springs up, and it is this. It is the morning when Jesus entered the synagogue at Capernaum, and there was a man with an unclean spirit there. And the man cried, 'Let us alone, what have we to do with Thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?' And Jesus? Jesus rebuked him saying, 'Hold thy peace and come out of him.' It was impossible for Christ, just because he was the Christ, to let that devil-ridden soul alone. And wherever men are living on in sin, helpless and bound, strangers to peace and God, the church of Jesus cannot let them be. A sinful soul may cry, Let me alone! And a heathen world may cry, Let me alone! But with a sweet and masterful intolerance, Christ is still deaf to that; and we must help, and we must save mankind, even in their own despite.

This grace, then, of letting alone frees no man from his moral responsibility either towards his

wandered or his heathen brother. Where, then, does it come in in human life? We shall take another Gospel incident and see. I find Christ sitting at Simon the leper's table, and the woman who was a sinner is kneeling there, and she has broken the alabaster box, and is pouring the precious ointment on the feet of Jesus. And the disciples murmur and are indignant. They cannot understand this gross extravagance. 'Might not this ointment have been sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?' Let her alone, says Jesus, why trouble ye the woman? Let her alone, you do not understand. She is serving with a service of her own, moved by the passion of an all-pardoning love: there is one work, there is one character for her, there is another service and another life for you.

And that, brethren, is one glory of the Gospel. It does not crush men into one common mould, but it gives the freest play to individuality, and perfects and crowns each struggling soul apart. You are never yourself till you are Christ's, and woe to that preaching of an exalted Lord that forces men's service into a common type! It is not because I want to be original, it is because I

want to be a Christian, that I say to all murmuring disciples, Let me alone, I have *my* box to break, it is not yours. I want to see the keen man in this church, the man who is honourable and Christian in his business. And I want to see the philanthropist in this church, the man who is eagerly bent on doing good. And I want to see the dreamer in this church, the man who feels the beauty of the world, and never does anything, perhaps, except reflect it. And I wish to say to the philanthropist, Do not upbraid the merchant. And I wish to say to the keen man of business, Do not despise the dreamer. Let him alone. He too is serving God. There is need for the purification of the market. There is need for heroic work among the poor. There is need that the beautiful should be interpreted. And when all is over, and the morning breaks, and the manifold service of a million hearts is unified in Christ, you will be thankful that you let alone, for there will be more 'well done's' than you had ever dreamed !

There are times, then, when we must leave God alone. There are times when we must let man alone. I just want to say this in closing :

Heaven grant it that God never let you or me alone.

There is a terrible text in the Old Testament : 'Ephraim is joined to his idols : let him alone.' I have pleaded with Ephraim, says God, for years. I have pleaded with Ephraim as a father with his child. But Ephraim has spurned Me : given his heart to his idols ; and Ephraim is reprobate, his day of grace has set. 'Ephraim is joined to his idols : let him alone.' Drive on thy chariot, Ephraim, to thy hell. There is a terrible text in the New Testament. It is when Jesus says to Judas, 'What thou doest, do quickly.' For I have pleaded with thee, O Judas, I have prayed with thee. And now his doom is sealed : let him alone. Out, Judas, get it over, get it done, and to thine own place, hastily. The hour may come when God lets us alone.

Do you say that hour will never come to you ? O friend, O sister, watch ! For it is not by a desperate career, and it is not by one black and awful deed, that a man shall sin away the grace of God. It is by the silent hardening of our common days, the almost unnoticed tamperings with conscience, the steady dying-out of what is

best under the pressure of a worldly city : it is by *that* the spiritual dies, it is by *that* men become castaway. Better the harshest discipline than that. Great God of mercy, let none of us alone ! Deal with us, lead us, chasten us as thou wilt, if only we be sanctified, ennobled, and drawn out of self into the light of Him who is chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.

THE CHOKED WELLS

And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had
digged in the days of Abraham his father.—Gen. xxvi. 18.

IT is a strange history, the history of Isaac. It is full of the lights and shadows, the trials and hopes, that are woven into the web of human life. I rejoice in the full humanity of these old patriarchs. I can never be thankful enough to the Almighty for the exceeding frankness of the Bible. If God had hidden the failings of His children, or sketched them with a halo round their heads as in the dull lives of mediæval saints, we should long since have shut this Bible, and let the dust gather on its boards. It lives because the men within it live. It lives because of its wonderful humanity. It is the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ inspiring men of like passions with ourselves, that gives the dew of an eternal youth to Scripture.

Well, Isaac was a rich and prosperous man when he pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar. And it was in the valley of Gerar, where he dwelt, that he digged again the wells of his father Abraham. Now I want to spiritualise that text to-night. I want to lift it up into the light of Christ. And we shall get to the spiritual worth of it if you will follow me through it in this way. Firstly, the wells of our fathers may get choked : ‘the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham.’ Secondly, we must each dig for ourselves to reach the water : ‘and Isaac digged again the wells of water.’ Thirdly, our rediscovered wells were named long since : ‘he called their names after the names by which his father had called them.’

1. First, then, the wells of our fathers may get choked.

You will observe I say they may get choked, not must. There are some wells where men were drinking when the world was young, and where women came with their pitchers on their heads, and sang and drew in the very dawn of history ; and spite of all the ages, they are still fresh, and the dripping bucket plashed in them this day. Such

was the well of Jacob, for example. And Jesus, weary with His journey, drank of that, though Jacob had been sleeping in his grave for centuries; and the traveller still slakes his thirst there. Some wells then, in the preserving providence of God, are never choked.

But the common fate of wells is not like that. Time, changing environment, or even malicious mischief, silts them up. The water is there, but it is hidden, buried. There are well-springs where our fathers slaked their thirst, there were cool waters for their parched souls, there were deep places shadowed from the glare, and they drew comfort and power and hope out of the depths. And the children need to be refreshed just as their fathers did; but somehow the old wells have got choked for them.

Perhaps the most signal instance of that choking the world has ever seen, was the law of Moses in the time of Christ. Once, in the golden days of Israel, the law of Moses had been a well of water. Men had looked down into its strange deeps, and seen reflected in the waters of it something of heaven. It was not wine—it was not the wine of the Gospel. But, at least, it

was water for the thirsty soul. Then came the Pharisees—and a Pharisee is the worst Philistine under heaven—then came the Pharisees and Jewish lawyers, and buried God's simple law in such a mass of learned human folly, poured such a cargo of sand upon that spring, that the wells were choked, and the waters that their fathers drank were lost. And souls would have perished of thirst, but for Jesus Christ.

And have we not found the same thing in the Gospel? There is nothing more tragic in the history of Christianity than the silting and choking of our fathers' wells.

Take the great central doctrine of the sacrifice on Calvary. What a joy, what a power there was in that for the men who perused the letters of the New Testament. What a sweet and unexplained simplicity about it to the first hearts to whom the tidings came. It was the gladdest news that ever cheered the world, that Jesus died on Calvary for men. But by and by that well got silted up. It became filled with intolerable views of God, it was buried under degrading views of man. The well was choked. The Philistines had done it. And the children went thirsty where their fathers drank.

Think of the sacraments. Do you want to know the blessings of a sacrament? Go and ask the Ethiopian eunuch that, as he mounts his chariot again after his baptism. Do you wish to see the comfort of a sacrament? Go and read the story of the primitive church again, when the disciples broke bread from house to house. The sacraments were wells in that bright morning, where the humblest follower of Jesus Christ could drink. They were cool places, with the green fern rooting in the shadow, and the waters of rest within, far down, beneath. And when I think how that simple ritual has been degraded, how the bitterest quarrels of an angry Christendom have centred and screamed around the bread and wine, I see how the wells of our fathers may get choked.

Think of the Bible. I thank God that for many a heart that well is still unchoked. I am glad that there are men and women here to-night who are not ignorant, who are not afraid of the truth nor of the light, and the Word of God is still their guide. But here is a young fellow, and he is one of thousands, or a young woman, and she is one of hundreds,—and you

were trained in a home where the Bible was daily read, and you caught the flavour of it in your father's speech ; and you cannot think of your mother but you see the Bible open on her knee, and what a heroine your mother was you know. And you, O son, O daughter, of old-fashioned parents, whose shoe-latchets you are unworthy to unloose—for *you* that well of the ages has been choked. It may be doubt has done it. It may be the storm of criticism that is raging. It may be that mass of impertinent literature that is keeping us back from what is pure and good. Whatever the cause, the well of your fathers has been choked for you. You never get help or strength or courage there.

2. But I pass on : and in the second place, we must each dig for ourselves to reach the water.

Of all the parables that Jesus spake, if we except that of the prodigal son, I think the most wonderful, for its intensity and power, is the story of the house built on the rock. Now, there is one fine touch in that fine parable that is almost lost in our English version. It is where we are told the man digged deep. But the expression is far stronger than digged deep. It is, he digged,

and kept on deepening. And the picture is of a man who takes his spade, and he says, There is rock down here, and I shall reach it. And he digs and deepens, and he deepens and digs, and the sweat falls, and he is weary, but he digs ; and he strikes on the solid rock at last, and builds there, and when the tempest burst—you know. And was there no rock under the sand as well? Was there no solid basis where the *other* built? Yes, hidden under the sand, deep down, was rock. But he refused to dig for it himself: he was too sluggish and inert to go on deepening ; he took things as he found them, built on what lay to hand ; and when the storm broke—you know.

And one great blight upon the church to-day is just that men and women will not dig. They are either content to accept their father's creed, or they are content, on the strength of arguments a child could answer, to cast it overboard. But to bend down and dig, to vow before heaven only to build on rock, and then to believe that, in a universe like this, with God in heaven, somewhere there must be rock to build my life on, and somewhere there must be water for my soul to drink—that high enthusiasm and

new endeavour breathed upon you, brother, by the spirit of Jesus, would stablish you, make a man of you, and send a thrill into the church of God.

And you can always tell when a man has been digging for himself by the freshness, the individuality of his religion. All we like sheep have gone astray, and it is very hard to tell one sheep from another. But in our father's home we are all children, and what a world of difference between the bairns ! Could you ever confuse the apostle John with Peter ? Did you ever read James and think you were studying Paul ? It is the hypocrites who are tarred with the same stick. It is the surface-Christians who cannot afford to be original. The humblest souls, if they have dug for themselves, and by their own search have found the water, will have a note in their music that was never heard before, and some discovery of God that is their own.

3. That leads me to our third thought for to-night. Our first was this : remember that the wells of our fathers may get choked. And our second was that we each must dig for ourselves

to find the water. Here is our third and last: our rediscovered wells were named long since.

When Isaac dug his wells at Gerar, men had forgotten about the wells of Abraham. And as Isaac dug and rounded out the basins, there was not a man of them but thought this was a new work. But the day came when Isaac named his wells. And when the neighbours gathered and asked him what the names were, they found they were names that had been given by Abraham. And then the past would flash on them again. They would remember how on these very spots, when they were children, Abraham had dug and drank. The wells were not new. They were but rediscovered. And the rediscovered wells were named long since.

Now if I am in earnest about the higher life, I seem to be always finding some new well. I come on them strangely, unexpectedly. I dig and discover the cool water there. There is an element of sweet surprise, there is a constant wonder and a constant freshness in it, when I am fighting my own way to God and heaven. Who thinks that the life of religion is monotonous? There is no novel so full of novelties as it. New truths flash

out on me. New prospects summon me. I am thrilled with the unexpected things that dawn on me when I am pressing with heart and soul towards the mark. I never pray but a new light is given. I never dig but a new well is found. And we think at first these wells are all our own. We think at first that never one single soul out of the twice ten thousand who have gone before us had ever any experience of this. It is *our* well, it is *our* discovery, it is a new thing ! it is quite unnamed. But the day comes when we find it is not so. The rediscovered wells were named long since. They are the very waters that our fathers drank ; but the toil and effort, the struggle and the prayer that it took us to reach them, made them so fresh to us that we thought they were a new thing in the world.

And therefore I say to every young man and woman here to-night : Be utterly fearless in the pursuit of truth. And if it be the craving for the best that fires you, and the true longing to be at peace with God, you will make great discoveries, my brother, and they will all be wonderful to you, and you will live to find they were all known and named when Abraham

pitched his tent beside Beersheba. You remember the old legend of *Quo Vadis*? You remember how Peter, flying from persecution at Rome, was met by a figure—it was Jesus' figure—and asked *Quo vadis?*—Whither goest thou, Peter? So many a father is asking of his son, and many a mother is asking of her daughter, *Quo vadis?*—Whither goest thou? And out into the desert may be the answer, searching for peace, searching for God! But the search will lead to the old waters yet, and the digging will draw to the ancient wells again.

THE CONTRADICTIONS OF LIFE

We went through fire and through water, but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.—Ps. lxvi. 12.

THIS psalm is the glad utterance of a soul that is looking back to the deliverance from Egypt. It is a song of praise for the great goodness of the Lord in bringing His people to the promised land. There had been times when that journey seemed a failure; times when the desert seemed so terrible that Israel began to cry again for Egypt. But God, in His strange sovereignty of leadership, was going to bring them on to Canaan yet. They had been brought through fire—the fiery sun in the wilderness of Sinai; the fiery serpents with their envenomed bites. They had been through water. Had they not crossed the Red Sea and the Jordan dry shod? Now they looked back on it, and the great souls saw it had all been necessary. They had needed that baptism in the Red Sea, they had needed the chastening of

the fiery serpents, if God was to bring them into a wealthy place.

But when a poet speaks of fire and water, I think he means more than the material elements. The commonest word, for the true poet's heart, has wings that carry it away into the distances. There are suggestions, there are expansions in our mean vocabulary, for him who sees as every poet does. And the literal fire and the literal water for David flashed into types and symbols of far other things. Water! O God, were there no seas of sorrow, were there no floods of tears? Fire! And had no fiery trials befallen them out in the desert and down by Sinai? It was all that that was in the poet's heart; it was all that he saw again. In *that* sense, what a depth of meaning in the words: 'We went through fire and water, but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.'

Now there are many lessons in that verse. They are filled with the truth of the leadership of God. And we might spend many a profitable hour in thinking of that omnipotent Deliverer. But I want to take one simple thought to-night, and send it out. It is the apparent contradictions of our life. For fire and water: are they not very opposites?

Fire mounts and water falls. And when we want to quench the fire, when the call rises to extinguish it, what do we use? Why, water. And we went,' says David, 'through fire and water, but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.' Life, then, has need of opposites. And life advances through its contradictions. If you are in line with the leadership of God, you come to your wealth by strange antagonisms. Now let us take that thought as a Scripture lamp, and swing it over some of the halls of life. There is a wonderful comfort and power in it for the right management of changing days. And think of life's common experiences first.

I take it there is no one here to-night but has known the music and the light of joy. It may have come like a bird upon the wing. It may have come more sternly when the fight was fought, when the hard duty was done. It may have leaped from one of these thousand wells that in the weariest heart, thanks be to God, are not quite silted up. And it made life so new, so rich, so filled with the possibilities of heaven, that we were ready to pray when we were joyful, and say that it was God who brought us here. And so it was, my

brother, so it was. He creates light, and every good gift is from Him. And the pleasures of music, and the song of birds, and the laughter of children, and the love of friends, these things and things like these, sources of happiness, crowned in the joy of Christ—these things are all from God.

And then come sorrow and suffering and loss, and gloom for the sunshine and weeping for the laughter. And the heart languishes and mourns like Lebanon, for the great season of the cross has come. And all that we ever hoped is contradicted. And here is the flat opposite of all our joy. And if God was in *that*, how can He be in *this*, unless our Leader contradicts himself?

But the strange thing about Jesus Christ is this, that He has saved us by being a man of sorrows, yet He was always speaking of His joy. And the strange thing about the Christian gospel is that joy is its keynote, joy is its glad refrain ; and yet it comes to me, to you, and whispers, My son, my daughter, take up thy cross and bear it. Did Jesus of Nazareth contradict Himself? Is the Gospel in opposition to the Gospel? Nay, friend, not that : a house divided against itself is doomed. But it is through the strange antagonisms of the

heart, and all the teaching of a diverse guidance, that we are brought at last to our wealthy place.

Remember, then, that even in daily life God means us to advance through contradictions. And when the brightness passes and the shadows come, when the song of the morning is changed into a cry, O do not think that any unlooked-for storm has swept you from your charted course to heaven. It takes all the lights and shadows to make a summer. There is December in the perfect year no less than June. The earth rolls on to harvest through night and day, through bitter cold and heat. And you and I need all that ever came to us, if our field is to be golden by and by.

But passing from these common experiences of life, I note that we cannot open our New Testament, but the same element of contradiction meets us.

I think, for example, of that great word of Jesus, 'Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.' And if there is one word that sums up the Gospel, and carries all Gospel blessings in its bosom, I know not what it is save that word 'rest.' Mr. Moody used to tell the story of a little girl who

was very ill. And her mother sang to her all the familiar hymns, and spoke to her of God and love; but the little daughter was restless and fretful still. And then her mother stooped down, and without a word she took her child into her arms. And her child, with a look of unutterable peace, said, 'Ah, mother, that's what I want.'

Now, what is the very opposite of rest? The very opposite of rest is struggle. And what stands in flat contradiction to the thought of peace? It is the thought of war. And yet I cannot open my New Testament but I find that the follower of Christ is called to war. 'Fight the good fight of faith,' says the apostle. 'Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be a victor in the evil day. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers.' And how is this? the gospel of Christ is rest, and yet the note of struggle rings in it? And it is peace, perfect peace, to live with Christ, and yet the trumpet sounds the alarm of war? It is an opposition, contradiction. The Bible seems in arms against itself. Here, you would say, is a divided house, and a divided house like that can never stand.

But 'we went through fire and water,' says the psalmist, 'and Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place !' And even fire and water are not more separated, each from other, than the peace and war that help us to our goal. I cannot explain these contradictions, but I *live* through them and they bear me on. For somehow I have never peace except I struggle, and I cannot struggle if I am not at peace.

There have been creeds that said, Why struggle, be at rest : they have rejected the battle that the soul might be still. And there are creeds that have said, You have nothing to do with rest : strive on, fight on, for character, heaven, God. And both philosophies, for all the practical help they ever gave, have been but still-born children. Christ comes : He opens His arms to these antagonisms. He takes the contradictory thoughts of peace and war into the very bosom of His Gospel ; and there, in ways mysterious, they harmonise, and my life advances through these contradictions.

Now come a little deeper—into the realm of thought. There too, through fire, through water, through truths that seem opposed to one another,

God brings His children to a wealthy place. There is one truth that is a little in abeyance nowadays : I mean the truth of the sovereignty of God. We dwell so lovingly upon God's fatherhood that we are almost in danger of forgetting His sovereignty. It comes like music from the hills to sing together, 'God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.' Do you believe in a foreseeing God ? Do you believe in a fore-ordinating God ? Do you believe that the very hairs of your head are numbered, and that not a sparrow can be struck, and fall, without the prevision of the Infinite Mind ? Then every event has been fore-calculated yonder, and every trifle is a pre-arrangement ; and back of every word I ever spoke, and every deed I ever tried to do, there moves the sovereign will of the Almighty.

Now tell me, in absolute opposition to that fore-ordering will—what stands ? You answer in a moment—the free-will of man. If I am free to will as I believe, and not the helpless creature of necessity, what comes of the pre-determining will of God ? If there is one flat contradiction in the universe, I think, my friends and brethren, it is there. And am I to give up my moral freedom ?

Heaven guard me, never ! And am I to cast the sovereignty of God to be swirled and scattered by the winds of heaven ? Nay, God forbid, life were a poor thing then. But I am to remember that I am going through fire and water, that God may bring me to a wealthy place. I thought that joy and sorrow were contradictions, yet my life has been growing rich and deep through that. I thought that peace and war were contradictions, but I never could win my crown except for that. I thought the sovereignty of God and the free-will of man were contradictions, yet it takes both believed in, even if unreconciled, to deepen, steady, and inspire my character. And some day, when the rolling mists have fled and the rosy-fingered dawn is on the hills, and in the dawn the King in His beauty comes, I shall find that things which to my finite and fragmentary mind seemed alien, and utterly opposed to one another, are blended into a perfect concord in the infinite intelligence of God.

One other word and I am done. One other difficult contrast, and I close.

You watch the streets when the factories come out. You see the children playing after school.

There is movement, ceaseless activity, shouting voices ; and you look at it, and say, what life is there ! It is life that is pulsing in these thousand hearts. It is life that is moving in these thousand feet. It is life that is echoing in these thousand voices.

And then, in the quiet Sabbath afternoon, you steal away to where the dead are lying. It may be there is some one of your own there, and a fresh flower will lie upon the grave to-night. And the eye is sealed and the voice is silenced, and the busy heart will never beat here again. And the gulf between joy and sorrow, between peace and war, is not so deep, so dark, as the great gulf between life and death. O death, thou last great enemy of life, what a measureless distance between thee and living ! All other antagonisms are but weak to this, the utter opposition of life and death.

But 'we went through fire and water,' says the psalmist, 'but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.' And no man ever wins his spiritual fortune save by the great antagonism of life and death. We are like seed-corn with all life germinant here. But how are we to win our golden harvest?

‘Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die.’ I live and die, to live. My life advances through that contradiction *now*. And in the great eternity, where the one light is God, and where every wound is staunched and tear is dried, I shall find that the burning fire of life was needed, and the waters of Jordan that quenched that fire were needed, to bring me out into my wealthy place.

THE MESSAGE OF THE RAINBOW

I do set my bow in the cloud.—Gen. ix. 13

WHETHER now for the first time the bow appeared upon the cloud, or whether it had been always there since God created mist and sunshine, is a quite secondary matter. The stress of the narrative is not on the creation of the rainbow, it is on the message that the rainbow speaks. There are some books that have stood upon my shelves for years, and all these years I have seen nothing in them. But a great sorrow comes to me, or a great trial, and my eye falls on the forgotten volume, and I take it down, and every page of it is bright with new meaning now. My new experience makes a new book of it. And out of the familiar rainbow the new experience of man made a new bow. It takes a flood sometimes to open the eyes. It takes the cries and terrors of the storm to waken us to the symbols of God's covenant. Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God. But

when a man has passed through the deep waters as Noah passed, there is a new depth in the familiar Bible, there is a new meaning in the familiar bow.

Now, I want this evening to reach some of that meaning. I want you to carry home something of the rainbow's prophecy and poetry. And first this comes : what we most dread, God can illuminate.

If there was one thing full of terror to Noah, it was the cloud. You cannot realise what awful memories spoke to him out of these black and thunderous banks. He saw the horrors of the Flood again, he heard the cries of infuriated beasts, he lived through all that wreckage of death, whenever the great clouds came rolling up. How a man dreads the lightning when it has struck his child ! How the poor women of Galveston will wake with a cry when the wind howls at night, and think of the storm that ruined life for them ! How Noah, with the fearful memories of the flood, would tremble at the rain-cloud in the sky ! Yet it was *there* that the Almighty set his bow. It was that very terror He illuminated. He touched with the radiance of His master-hand the very object that was the dread of Noah.

And a kind God is always doing that. What we most dread, He can illuminate. We thought it would be dark, almost unbearable, and there has been the bow upon the cloud. How often have we said, Ah, if that fell on us, we could not stand it. And it has fallen on us, that very thing, the thing we dreaded, that haunted us in dreams, and God has set His rainbow on the cloud. Was there ever anything more dreaded than the cross, that symbol of disgrace in an old world, that foulest punishment, that last indignity that could be cast upon a slave? And Christ has so illumined that thing of terror, that the one hope to-day for sinful men, and the one type and model of the holiest life, is nothing else than that. Was there ever anything more dreaded than the cross? Yes, perhaps one thing—death. But, ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’ We are begotten into an everlasting hope, and the rainbow of immortality is on the cloud. It is a fine aphorism in that fine book, *Guesses at Truth*, that while the ancients dreaded death, the Christian only fears dying. For a risen Christ has set His bow upon the cloud, and what men dreaded, God illuminates.

But now another lesson, and it is this : there is unchanging purpose in the most changeful things. All things are changeful, even the very hills. But in the whole of nature there is scarce anything so changeful as the clouds. Did you ever mark them when the wind was whistling ? Did you ever follow the cloud race under the stars ? We see the clouds, and there is one artist in a thousand who can paint the clouds ; but not for two seconds on end, so we are taught, are the form and outline of any cloud the same. What a strange tablet for the pen of God ! What a strange parchment for the symbol of that covenant that is to be unchanging and for ever ! Engrave it upon brass, and it will stand. Write it on marble, and it will breast the ages. But God says, No, but My unchanging covenant with man is to be painted on the ever-changing cloud ! Is not that strange ? When poor John Keats was dying, you remember the sentence that he would have them write upon his tombstone in the little churchyard at Rome : 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water.' But God, living and full of power, would have His name and covenant upon the cloud.

And if that means anything, surely it is this :

that through all change, and movement, and re-casting, run the eternal purposes of God. Happy the nation that has risen to that! Happy the woman who cherishes that faith! It is through the infinite changes of the universe that creation is moving to its far-off purpose. It is through the endless resettings of its life that every nation struggles to its ideal. It is through the lights and shadows of your little day, and the varying duty, and the shifting mood, and the tears, and the smiles, and the crosses, and the graves,—it is through these, swift, changeable as any cloud, that the unchangeable purposes of love and mercy, which far in eternity were willed for you in Christ, are moving, and growing to their triumph.

But I lift my eyes up to that bow again, and I am taught another lesson now: there is meaning in the mystery of life. I think it would be hard to find a literature in which that cloudland has not stood for mystery. I think it would be hard to find a child that has not built its palaces, and seen its marching armies, and caught a glimpse of ships upon the sea, all in that cloudy kingdom of the sky. The oldest poem and the youngest child feel something of the mystery of clouds. I could

understand a southerner being light-hearted, for he has lived and sung under that open blue. But if I want a man on whom has fallen the mystery of things, I go to one who has been crooned and cradled where the grey mists come creeping up the glen, and the heavy clouds come down over the hills. It is no chance that the sense and feeling of mystery should be so strong among these Highland dwellings, where the chasms are shrouded and the summits are hid. Clouds are the symbol, clouds are the spring of mystery.

And so, when God sets his bow upon the cloud, I believe that there is meaning in life's mystery. I am like a man travelling among the hills, and *there* is a precipice and I know it not, and yonder is a chasm where many a man has perished, and I cannot see it. But on the clouds that hide, God lights His rainbow ; and the ends of it are here on earth, and the crown of it is lifted up to heaven. And I feel that God is with me in the gloom, and there is meaning in life's mystery for me. O heart, bowed with the inscrutable mysteries of things, have you felt that ?

I trace the rainbow thro' the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain,
That morn shall tearless be !

But there is another message of the bow. It tells me that the background of joy is sorrow. I remember reading in the life of Frederic Robertson of Brighton some memorable words. If ever there was a brave man, it was Frederic Robertson. He was the last to take a pessimistic view of anything. Yet he said this: 'The deep undertone of the world is sadness. A solemn bass recurring at measured intervals, and heard through all other tones. Ultimately all the strains of this world's music resolve themselves into that tone, and I believe,' he says, 'that only the cross interprets the mournful mystery of life.'

And one has only to walk with open eyes to feel that Frederic Robertson is right. Laughter is real, thank God. And joys innumerable flash like the swallows under the eaves of the most humble life. But God has painted His rainbow on the cloud, and back of its glories yonder is the mist. And underneath life's gladness is an unrest, and a pain that we cannot well interpret, and a sorrow that is born we know not how. Will the cross of Calvary interpret life if the deepest secret of all life is merriment? Shall the Man of Sorrows be the ideal of man if laughter is the undertone of all?

Impossible! I cannot look at the rainbow on the cloud, I cannot see the Saviour on the cross, but I feel that back of gladness there is agony, and that the richest joy is born of sorrow.

And this last not least. This to take with you to your homes. This to lie down to sleep with and waken with when to-morrow morning breaks. This message of the bow never forget: there is mercy over the portal of God's dwelling. For what are the clouds in Scripture? They are God's pavilion. What were the clouds to this old Hebrew prophet? They were the Almighty's tent, His tabernacle. 'He cometh in a cloud.' 'Clouds and thick darkness are about His throne.' 'Out of the cloud there came a voice.' And there God set His bow, and His bow is the token of mercy to the world. And I feel that in this early dawn the poet-prophet had got the mind of Christ, and had seen mercy written on God's dwelling-place.

Have you seen that, my brother? Have you seen that, my sister? It is the sweetest syllable that ever fell from heaven into the bosom of a guilty world. O sinful heart, prayerless and God-forgetting, there is mercy, mercy, mercy for you to-night. The dwelling-place of God is bright

with it. And the heart of God is full of it. And the entreaties of Jesus Christ are throbbing with it. Who will go out into the crowded streets under the stars to-night crying for the first time for years, 'God be merciful to me a sinner'?

Will you?

RIGHT AND WRONG USES OF OUR PAST

Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy
God led thee.—Deut. viii. 2.

Forgetting those things which are behind.—Phil. iii. 13.

THERE seems a contradiction in these texts. They seem to be quite opposed to one another. You would almost think that the apostle Paul had broken with Moses so completely that he cast to the winds here the prophet's counsel. But Paul was Paul, and not a revolutionary. He was too big a man to scorn the past. He loved to say wise things that a wise God had taught him; but to say smart things, he was above all that. When I speak to a woman of the world about a man, one of the first things she will ask is, Is he clever? But when I speak to a child about a man, one of the first things she will ask is, Was he good? And we want to get back

that estimate of childhood. We want the coronet upon the head of goodness. Would you ever dream of calling Jesus clever? And it is Christ-like you and I want to be.

Paul, then, was not contradicting Moses. There is a kinship, there is a sweet society between the souls that seem to fight each other, if only the souls are big and strong enough. They are like peaks of the Alps above the cloud, that seem to challenge each other on that misty field; but when the breath of heaven drives the cloud away, they are twin summits of one mountain after all. It is the little souls that have no fellowship. That gossiping intercourse of godless hours is a poor, poor substitute for heart society. Let a man rise a little through self-conquest: let him lift his eyes up to the hills with Jesus; and in the very antagonisms of his struggle, he will catch the accents of a brother's voice.

I take it, then, for all apparent contrasts, that Moses and Paul are in true harmony. They are forging out a doctrine of the past, and it takes prophet and apostle to do that. The one turns round, and looking down the past, he cries Remember! The other turns his head and cries

Forget ! There are some things, then, that I must remember, and there are other things I must forget. In other words, I can so train my memory, by choice, by meditation, and by prayer ; I can so drive it into the service of my soul ; I can give it such a spiritual education, that it will open its hand and cast to the winds of heaven whatever would check me in my struggle heavenwards ; but grip like a vice and wave like a banner o'er me whatever will help me to my distant goal. There is not a faculty but may be sanctified. There are few faculties so rich as memory.

Some one has said to-day has two great enemies. The one is to-morrow and the other is yesterday. And memory plays such madcap pranks sometimes that we are almost half-inclined to think that true. Do you remember Israel in the desert, and how they spoke to Moses about Egypt ? 'Is it a small thing,' cried the rebellious children, 'that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey?' Were there no brickfields there? They had forgotten that. Was there no swirl of the taskmaster's lash ? The sound of it had passed long years ago. Faced by the desert and the desert-hunger, that wizard memory brought

back the milk and honey. They would have been better men and stronger travellers, more worthy of their leader and their God, if they had forgotten the things that were behind.

And the wizard memory still plays these tricks. It smoothens out the wrinkles of the past. It was a furnace of iron when we dwelt in it. It is almost a land of milk and honey now. We hear men talking of the good old times. I grant you they were old, but were they good? I sometimes think that had we a twelvemonth of them, we should all long for the bad new times again. It is distance lends enchantment to the view. It is across the valley that the song is sweet. And when we are tempted to sit down and dream, and mourn for a happier past and wish it back, it is *then* that Paul and all the saints of God cry Forward! and forget the things that are behind. If happiness has gone, then let it go! If innocence has fled, so be it. But still there is duty, and that is more than happiness. And still there is character, and that is more than innocence. And the best is still before me in the battle, if I am only true to self and God.

In that sense, then, it may be true that the great

enemy of my to-day is yesterday. But there is a deeper and a more Christlike sense in which yesterday and to-day are bosom friends. They are both working in a common purpose ; they are both given by the same Hand Divine ; they are both carved out of the same eternity. Now you can tell a man by his friends, the saying is. And this is certain, we must know the past if we would ever understand to-day.

We meet a stranger, for instance, in the house of a friend, and there is a look of suffering about her face and a certain mute agony within her eyes ; and we know at once, though never a word has passed, that we are face to face with tragedy. And the face haunts us, it is so sweet, so sad ; it haunts us, and we want to know its story ; and then comes some hour when the lips are unlocked under the touch of sympathy, and we hear the record of that bitter past, and we see the hour when sun and moon were darkened,—and we understand the sorrow of to-day because we know the tragedy of yesterday.

Or there is a man whom we have passed for weeks, and the look of conquest and the glow of power about him would catch and rivet the very

blindest eye. And we never see him but we fall a-wondering what is the meaning of that look of victory. And then we learn it. We are told the story of his life some day. We see the humble cottage where he was born. We find how he struggled against tremendous odds through school, through college, to his present place. We understand the triumph of to-day because we know the dauntless fight of yesterday. And there is the moral value of remembrance. Not *now* must I forget the things that are behind. But to grasp to-day, and have a song of praise in it, and understand its leaning and its power, I must remember the way by which my God has led me. There are some men who, had they killed a lion and a bear as David did, would have lived on the reputation of it to the end, and been insufferable. But David said, 'The Lord who delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and the Lord who delivered me out of the paw of the bear, will give me the victory over this Goliath !' And the memory of the Almighty made him strong. Forget past triumphs if they make you proud. Remember them if they make you strong. Forget past failures when the trumpet calls.

Remember them when you are prone to boast. Have you no Red Sea crossed? Have you no lion slain? Have you no token of the love of God in the year that is driving to its close to-night? Bind that upon your heart, my brother, and set it as a frontlet on your brow, my sister. There is a moral power in remembrance when I remember the bounty of my God.

And what about past sins? Shall I remember these? Shall I forget my sins that are behind? I dare say, brother, you have sometimes felt that the answer to that was lodged in other hands. You have tried to forget, you have tried to forget: you cannot. There is an involuntary resurrection of the past. You have prayed: you have come to the blood of Christ for cleansing: you are a pardoned man. But the hour comes when in a flash we see it again, and the old sin that we thought dead is back.

Does that dishearten you, so that you sometimes doubt if there is any pardon, and are tempted to question the truth of God's forgiveness? Remember that even David, redeemed by blood, was harassed and haunted by his guilty past. 'My sin is ever before me,' cries the psalmist.

'It is there when I waken ; it is there when I sleep ; it is there in my home and in the house of God.' Yet God, for His dear Son's sake, had wiped that sin away, and David was on the road to glory all the time.

The fact is, it is a sign of growth, of stress and strain, of climbing of the hills, that resurrection of the buried past. It is not when I am at my worst it comes. It is when I am stirred by God to better things. It was when the sufferings of Christ were crowned at Calvary that the graves were opened and the dead came forth. If I am willing always to be impure, I can forget with ease the impure past. If I am quite content to be a prayerless man, the prayerless years slip from me like a dream. But let me be moved by heaven to seek my knees, and how the prayerless days confront me now ! Let me lift up my eyes to the purity of Jesus, and my vile past is at my side again. There is some token of a struggle heavenward, brother, when that blood-forgiven past comes back. Therefore I say, even of forgiven sin,—I say, forget the things that are behind ; and if you cannot, if spite of all there is that resurrection, then remember the way that the Lord thy God

hath led thee, thank Him that He has called thee out of darkness into the marvellous light of the Redeemer, praise Him that though all the graves were opened, and though the sea gave up her dead, all *that* shall never separate the soul from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ.

There is one bright light that the gospel of Jesus sheds upon our past. It is the light of the eternal future. We hardly realise, we are so used to it, what a weight was lifted from a weary world by setting a man's past in that endless vista. When Christianity entered the world, the noblest teaching in the world was Stoicism ; and one has but to read a Stoic's diary to feel the dead weight of an iron past. For the Stoic there was nothing before birth, and for the Stoic there was nothing beyond the grave ; and the one passion of his heart was this, to grow complete and perfect in his threescore years. It was a noble aim, it was a hopeless one. There is a cry of despair from its very noblest children. Life fled, the past grew larger, death and the grave drew nearer every year. And life was to have been a perfect thing, rounded, harmonious,

unified, complete,—and the noblest Stoic of them all confessed it was a tattered and a tangled failure.

And then came Jesus, and threw down the wall, and launched life out into an endless future. And men ceased to crave an impossible perfection, in that new hope of an eternal growth. And they ceased to cry over a sinful past with the sorrow of this world which worketh death. For in the very failures of the past that marred the beauty of the Stoic's circle, they traced a beauty that was not of earth, for they were being trained and disciplined and humbled for an eternal fellowship with God. The Stoic looked upon the oak-tree of the forest, and he saw where the storm had rent away a branch, and he said, The tree is marred, the tree will never be the same again. But the Christian, in the new light of Jesus, asked, Has there been growth? Are the rings forming, has the sap been circulating, spite of tempest? If so, all's well, even though the branch be rent; there will still be the music of a thousand leaves when the time of the singing of the birds is come.

And so I want the disciples of Jesus who are

here, and who from this ridge, if I may call it so, are looking back over the vista of the year ;¹ I want them to ask themselves this simple question : Has there been spiritual growth in my own life ? I don't want to know how your affairs are prospering, but I do want to know how your soul is prospering. I don't ask if you are a better man, but I do ask if you are a growing man. O friend, it has been a strange year for you : sin in it, folly in it, neglect of duty and of God in it ; but if the heart is crying 'I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me,' if the interests of life are moral ones for you, if the one worth of being alive at all is daily self-conquest to the glory of God,—then bid defiance to your sin and failure, in the name of Christ forget the things that are behind, there is a year worth living ahead of you.

And do I speak to any who are not of Christ ? who have mocked at religion many a time, and yet somehow are here, and among my best listeners, and who are saying, 'God helping me, I must have a better New Year than this one.' Come friend, come sister, break with your past to-

¹ Preached on the last Sunday of the year

night. Break with that friend. Give up that habit. Turn. You are no longer a child. Life is real now. There are infinite possibilities for you. Jesus is here : Follow Him. Take Him. Trust Him. God pity you if you say No again to the lealest friend in the whole world !

THE LOVE OF LIFE

Yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.—Job ii. 4

IN this immortal drama, the book of Job, we have the statement of problems that are always fresh. Some questions agitate an age and pass away. Some problems harass and vex a generation, and the coming generation smiles at them. But there are others, that turn on the sufferings of man, and on the meaning of life, and on the providence of God, that are undying, and the literature that enshrines these problems is immortal. Now in that literature there is one masterpiece at least—the book of Job. It is the cry of a true heart that has come ringing down the aisles of time and found an echo in twice ten thousand hearts. It is the statement of the old-new mysteries of human life, that for many of us would have been insoluble but for the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, here in our text the speaker is Satan, and the father of lies, like many of his children, has lighted for once upon the truth. ‘And Satan answered the Lord and said, “Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.”’ That ‘skin for skin’ is a proverbial expression. Perhaps it means he would give the skin of his arm to save the skin that covers his heart. Or perhaps it means that to save his own skin, he would give the skins of all his cattle,—for wealth was measured by cattle in those days. But, at any rate, the underlying thought is this, that anything, everything, a man will give for life. And it is on that love of life I wish to speak to-night.

And I do not think that I shall be gainsaid when I say that this love of life is universal. Doubtless there are individual lives where it is lost: we have our suicides in every country. And doubtless, too, there are hours in every life—hours of depression, hours of unutterable melancholy—when, in the words of Keats, we are half in love with easeful death. But these things are abnormal; they are the exceptions that help to prove the rule; they only bring into clearer relief that the love of life is a universal instinct. Is it

a product of our civilisation? The savage of Africa fights like a tiger against death. Is it the outcome of happiness and luxury? The beggar in the street clings to his life as grimly as my lord of twenty thousand acres. It is an elementary passion of the heart. It is a universal instinct of the race. Rich, poor, white, black; the Esquimaux amid the eternal snows, and the Kaffir under the sunlight of the tropics, all know this love of life.

And I want you to note, too, that this love for life is not a passion for life in the abstract. It is a passion for my own individual being. That is important. There are dreamers of dreams and seers of visions amongst us. There are men who can body out a golden age and picture a life that would be very heaven. And I should not wonder if poor humanity—cribbed, cabined, and confined in this existence—should fall in love with a vision of life like that. But it is not for a visionary life my instinct craves. And it is not for a life in other states and realms that there is a deep-down passion in my soul. My love of life is for my own strange life. It is for the life that I have known and lived, with all its limita-

tions and with all its poverty, with all its failure and with all its pain. It is for *this* life, skin for skin. It is for *this* life that all that a man hath he will give.

And so by the road of nature do I reach the truth, that the life that God has given me is good. I know that I am a fallen man. I am corrupt and marred. I am out of gear and out of harmony. But I cannot believe that a universal instinct should hunger and thirst for what is evil. If life is bad, my longing to continue it is sinful. And if the longing to continue it is sinful, the very essence of my being is sin—but I never heard that the wildest doctrine of the Fall gave such a power and place to sin as that. Under the sod there are still seeds of heaven. Behind the cloud there are still gleams of light. Back of the curse and ruin of my state there are still elemental things that cry for God. And the love of life in you is such a seed. And the love of life in me is such a gleam. And I take its verdict that life is worth continuing, and spite of all its tangle and its pain, is a rich heritage and gift from God.

And doubtless, brethren, God put that instinct

here just for the preservation of His gift. For the truth is that, unless we loved life so, I hardly know how we should live at all. There are some few for whom life is very sweet. It is a banquet, it is a joy, it is a song. And the music of life's lilt so takes their heart that they could sit and listen for ever to it. But is your life like that? Is there no weariness, no fever, and no fret? Is there no dull monotony, no want of prospects? Is there no burden, no daily cross to bear? Until you cry, perhaps, Is life worth living? But behind that there is another question, Is life worth loving?—and the Creator has answered that Himself, and put the love of life within us, and we must love it whether we will or no. In the old story of Hero and Leander, you remember how Hero was a priestess on the coast of Asia, and Leander on the coast of Europe loved her, and every night, out of his very love, he stemmed the tides and swam the Hellespont. So God, who knows the currents and the tides, and all the storms and the buffeting waves of time, fills His weak children with the love of life, and filling us so, has made strong swimmers of us.

Now it is worthy of remark that at least one-

fourth of the whole human race are convinced that this love of life is a bad thing. There are upon this earth to-night some 350 millions of human beings who would tell you that the greatest curse of humanity was the desire to live. They do not deny that that desire exists. They feel it just as powerfully as you. But to get rid of it and slay it out, and so to pass into a selfless, dreamless sleep, that is the desire and heaven of every Buddhist. You will remember that Buddha lived some six hundred years before Jesus of Nazareth. You will remember how, when he opened his eyes upon the world, he was crushed to the earth by the spectacle of pain. And he went apart and fasted and meditated on the fact of suffering. Until at last there flashed upon his soul that back of all suffering was the love of life. 'Get rid of that,' said Buddha. 'Aim at the selfless, dreamless heaven of Nirvana, and the cries of pain will grow fainter in the ages, and the tides of suffering will cease to flow.' And every true Buddhist heart holds that ; and every true Buddhist is a pessimist. To be self-conscious is the misery. To be an individual is the pity of things. Let me get rid of self and

slay this love of life, and cease for ever and a day to be myself, and this poor world will cry itself to sleep. And in Ceylon and China and Burmah and in India, millions upon millions of our brother-men have no other faith and no other hope than that.

I think it were worth while to be a missionary just to bring home to these the teaching of Jesus on the love of life. For here the gospel of Jesus that we preach stands separated by a whole world from Buddha. Jesus of Nazareth was just as sensitive to pain as Buddha was. Jesus of Nazareth saw all the suffering that Buddha saw. Jesus of Nazareth was scourged and tortured as Buddha never was. And Buddha said, Life is an evil, out with it ! Come, crucify this cursed love of life ! But Jesus, who Himself was crucified, said and still says, I came that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

I want to ask then, as I close, how it was possible for Jesus to say this ? How could He justify the love of life, knowing as He did the pain and sin of it ? The answer lies in Jesus' view of life. Christ took our human life and

poured a flood of unexpected radiance on it. He flashed new light on it, discovered hidden glories, made it a new and a diviner thing. And when once I mean by life what Jesus meant, the love of it becomes a holy passion.

For first, for Jesus life meant character, not eating, drinking. Nor does a man's life consist in the abundance of things that he possesses. But to grow tender, merciful, true, trustful, that is life ; and to grow hard, unclean, unkindly, that is death. And is there no place for pain in such a life? And have not trial and suffering been God's ministries to sweeten, to deepen, to purify, to bless? If life is a playground, I am a pessimist. If life is a school, then I desire to live. And my love of life is God's encouragement to me to rise, to play the man, to overcome, until I reach the likeness of my Lord.

And then, for Jesus life was fellowship with God, and God is a sharer in the agony of things. There was no God for Buddha. There is no God in any living sense for any pessimist. For Jesus God was Father, God was friend, living in every heart-beat of His child, sharing in every sorrow, comrade in every woe. And

when over me there is an arch like that, and a companionship and a compassion that carry me forward in everlasting arms, life is no longer mean, it is magnificent, and the love of life becomes the love of God.

And lastly, for Jesus life was the threshold of immortality, and the love of life the spark of an eternal flame. Why should I love to live when life is hard ? Why should I clutch the cup and tremble lest I spill a single drop when every draught of the wine of life is bitter ? It is not only because life is character. It is not only because God is good. It is because my life shall last for ever. I shall yet be in harmony with God ; I shall be for ever myself in being His, and the life of love with God for ever, will at last make clear to me my love of life.

THE LONELINESS OF SIN

He went immediately out : and it was night.—John xiii. 30.

WHAT first strikes us here is the utter loneliness of Judas. No word-painting, however vivid, could give a deeper impression of that than these few words of John : ‘ He went immediately out : and it was night.’ Within, there was light and gladness, and the richest fellowship this world had ever known. For Christ was there, and John was leaning upon Jesus’ bosom, and the talk was on high and holy themes that evening. Outside was fierce hostility. Outside was dark. And no man drove out Judas. No push and curse hurried him to the door. It was the momentum of his own heart and life that impelled him to choose the darkness rather than the light.

Shall we follow Judas into the dark street? He turns and looks, and the light is gleaming from the window of the upper chamber. He

hurries on, and the streets are not empty yet. A band of young men, like himself, goes singing by. The sounds of evening worship come stealing from the houses. And everything that tells of love, and breathes of fellowship, and speaks of home, falls like a fiery rain on Judas' heart. The loneliness of Judas was intolerable. He had made his bed in hell. A friend of mine was once preaching on that text in the Assembly Hall in Edinburgh. And when he left the hall and was stepping home-wards down the Mound, a young man rushed across the street and grasped him by the arm and cried, 'Minister, minister, I have made my bed in hell,' and disappeared. And the lonely misery of that cry will ring in my friend's ears till his dying day. There was a loneliness like that on Judas. He was estranged, apart. 'He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night.'

There is a sense in which every man is lonely. Each has his different road, his different trial, his different joy; and these differences are invisible barriers between us, so that even in fellowship we walk apart. We say we know that

woman thoroughly, and we believe we do. Till some day there comes a new temptation to her, or a new chance to be heroic,—and all our reckonings are falsified, and there are depths our plummet never sounded. I cannot utter forth all that I am. Gesture, speech, even music are but rude interpreters. The dullest has his dream he never tells. The very shallowest has his holy ground. There is an isolation of the soul that brings the note of pathos into history, and makes me very loth to judge my friend, and leads me to the very feet of Christ.

For there is a deep sense in which Christ was lonely too. And it is strange that on the night of the betrayal, perhaps the two loneliest figures in the world were the sinful disciple and his sinless Lord. But oh ! the world of difference between the two ! Christ lonely because He was the Son of God, bearing His cross alone and going out into the glory. And Judas lonely because he was the son of perdition, with every harmony destroyed by sin, and going out into the night. Now towards which figure are you making, friend ? For towards one or other your feet are carrying you. There is a loneliness upon

the mountain top. There is a loneliness in death and in the grave. And the one is the isolation of the climbing heart, and the other the isolation of the lost. Towards which? whither? to-night. Is it 'I to the hills will lift mine eyes'? or 'the wages of sin is death'?

This, then, is one continual effect of sin. In every shape and form, in every age and country, it intensifies the loneliness of life. We talk of social sins. All sin is ultimately anti-social. We hear of comradeships based upon common vices. All vice in the long-run grinds the very thought of comradeship to powder. Sin isolates, estranges, separates; that is its work. It is the task of God ever to lead us to a richer fellowship. It is the work of sin, hidden but sure, to make us lonelier and more lonely till the end. From all that is best, and worthiest, and purest, it is the delight of sin to separate me. And I want to touch on the three great separations that sin brings, and bringing, makes life a lonely thing.

First, then, sin separates a man from his ideal.

When I have an ideal, I can never be quite lonely. When I have the vision beckoning me on, when I have something to live for and to

struggle for higher than coin or food, there is a fervour in my common day, and a quiet enthusiasm for to-morrow, that are splendid company for my secret heart. And even if my ideal be a dream, it is so. In the famous battle between the clans on the North Inch of Perth, rendered immortal in the story of Sir Walter Scott, you will remember how the old chieftain Torquil sent out his sons to fight for Hector. And as one son after another fell under the smiting blows of Hal of the Wynd, the old chief thundered out 'Another for Hector,' and another of his sons stepped forward to the battle. And they were all slain, every one of them, for Hector—and Hector was a coward. Let the ideal be a dream, yet men will fight for it; and fighting, the heart forgets its loneliness.

And the work of sin has been to separate the world from its ideals—to blot out the vision and to say to men, Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. Sin lays the emphasis on what I see. Sin holds me back from what I would be, and binds me a prisoner to what I am to-night. Until at last, through years of weary failure, all that we hoped and longed to be is gone, and the beckon-

ing hands have vanished, and the vision is fled, and we are alone with our own poor selves. Sin separates a man from his ideal. Judas had his ideal once, but the devil entered him, and the ideal died out; and from that hour Judas drew apart.

Again: not only does sin separate man from his ideal, it separates man from man.

When Cain slew Abel, he became an outcast. When David fell, he had to fly. When Peter denied Christ, he went out and wept bitterly. Sin broke life's lies for them, sundered the bonds that bound them to their fellows. Read over every narrative of sin within the Bible, and underneath the outward form of it—it may be passion, envy, treachery, revenge—you will detect, from Genesis to Revelation, the sundering of ties 'twixt man and man.

And sin is always doing that. There is not a passion, not a lust or vice, but mars and spoils the brotherhood of life, and tends to the loneliness of individual souls. God meant us to be friends. God has established numberless relationships. And God is righteousness and God is love, and the spirit of righteousness and love inspires them all. And

sin has been unrighteous from the first, and shall be cold and loveless till the end. O sin, thou severing and separating curse! There is no tie so tender but my vice will snap it. There is no bond so strong but sin will shatter it. It separates the father from his child ; it sunders hearts ; it creates distances within the home,—till the full harmonies of life are lost, and the deep fellowships of life impossible. And the world is lonelier because of sin.

And Jesus Christ knew that. Christ saw and felt sin's separating power. And so the Gospel, that rings with the note of brotherhood, centres in Calvary upon the fact of sin. The social gospel is but a shallow gospel, false to the truth and alien from Christ, unless it roots itself in the divine forgiveness and the inspiring power of the Holy Ghost. The poet Whittier tells a story of the Rabbi Nathan, who long lived blamelessly but fell at last, and his temptation clung to him spite of his prayers and fastings. And he had a friend, Rabbi Ben Isaac, and he felt that his sin had spoiled the friendship. But he would go to him and speak to him and tell him all. And when they met, the two embraced each other ; till

Rabbi Nathan, remembering his sin, tore himself from his friend's arms and confessed. It was the separating power of sin. But when Rabbi Ben Isaac heard his words, he confessed that he too had sinned, and he asked his friend to pray for him as Rabbi Nathan had asked himself. And there in the sunset, side by side, they knelt and each prayed with his whole heart for the other.

And when at last they rose up to embrace,
Each saw God's pardon in his brother's face.

Sin, separation—pardon, brotherhood: it is the order of the universe and God.

And so sin separates a man from his ideal. And so sin separates a man from men. But the most awful separation of all, that reaches the very heart of loneliness, is this: sin separates a man from God.

I never can be lonely in God's fellowship. When I detect his glory in the world, and trace his handiwork in field and sunset; when I recognise his voice in conscience, when I feel the power of His love in Christ; 'there is society where none intrudes,' there is the sweetest company in solitude; and I may dwell alone, but I can never be

a lonely man. ‘For me to live is Christ,’ said the apostle; and the friendship of God was so intense for him, that even in the prison at Philippi he had society.

But from the first it has been sin’s great triumph to separate the soul from God; and the deepest loneliness of sin is this, that it blinds me to One whom not to see is death, and bars me from the fellowship of Him whose friendship is of infinite value to my heart. If in the sky and sea, if in the call of duty, if in the claims of men, if in the love of Christ, if in all these I see and hear no God, this is a lonely world. And sin has blinded me, and made me lonely, as the prodigal was lonely when far from his father and his father’s home. Shall I arise and go to Him to-night? Shall I return by the way of Calvary to God? I have been separated from the holiest and the best. I have been living far from goodness and from God. But—

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd’st me come to Thee.
O Lamb of God, I come!

SOME FEATURES OF CHRIST'S WORKING

My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.—John v. 17.

It is characteristic of the Christian Gospel that its Saviour should be a worker. In the old world, it was hardly an honourable thing to work. It was a thing for slaves, and serfs, and strangers, not for freeborn men. Hence work and greatness rarely went together; and nothing could be more alien to the genius of paganism than a toiling God. Jesus has changed all that. He has made it impossible for us to think of God as indolent. It was a revolution when Jesus taught 'God loves.' But it was hardly less revolutionary when He taught 'God works.'

And He not only taught it, He lived it too. Men saw in Christ a life of endless toil, and 'he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' Had Jesus lived and taught in the quiet groves of

some academy, it would have made all the difference in the Christian view of work, and all the difference in the Christian view of God. But Jesus was a carpenter. And Jesus stooped to the very humblest tasks till He became the pattern and prince of workers. I want to look, then, at some features of His work to-night. For He has left us an example that we should follow in His steps.

Looking back, then, upon the work of Jesus, what strikes me first is the magnitude of His aim compared with the meanness of His methods.

It is a great thing to command an army. It is a great thing to be the master of a fleet. It is a great thing to be a minister of state, and help to guide a people towards their national destiny. But the aims of general, and of admiral, and of statesman, great in themselves, seem almost insignificant when we compare them with the purposes of Jesus. He claims a universal sovereignty. He runs that sovereignty out into every sphere. He is to be the test in moral questions. He is to shape our law and mould our literature. He is the Lord of life. He is the king and conqueror of death. These are the purposes of Jesus, far more stupendous than man had ever dreamed of

in his wildest moments. Will He not need stupendous methods if He is ever to achieve an aim like that?

And it is then the apparent meanness of His methods strikes us. Had He a pen of fire? He never wrote a line, save in the sand. Had He a voice of overmastering eloquence? He would not strive, nor cry, nor lift up His voice in the streets. Was there unlimited wealth at His command?—‘The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.’ Were His first followers men of influence?—‘Simon and Andrew were casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers.’ Or would He use the sword like Mohammed?—‘Put up thy sword into its place. He that taketh the sword shall perish by the sword.’ It seems impossible that in such ways Christ should achieve His purpose. It is the magnitude of His aim compared with the meanness of His methods that arrests me first.

It should be so with every Christian toiler. It is a simple lesson for every man and woman who seeks to serve in the true Christian spirit. Meanly surrounded, he should be facing heavenwards

Meanly equipped in all things else, he should be mightily equipped in noble hope. If I am Christ's, I cannot measure possibilities by methods. My heaven is always greater than my grasp. If I am Christ's, I cherish the loftiest hope, and am content to work for it in lowliest ways.

And it is there the difference comes in between a visionary and a Christian. A visionary dreams his dreams, and builds his castles in the air, and they are radiant, and wonderful, and golden, and the light of heaven glitters on every minaret. And then, because he cannot realise them *now*, and cannot draw them in all their beauty down to earth, the visionary folds his hands, does nothing, and the vision goes. But the true Christian, with hopes as glorious as any visionary's, because they are the hopes of Jesus Christ, carries the glory of them into his common duty and into the cross-bearing of the dreary day. And though the generations die, and the purposes of God take a thousand years to ripen, he serves and is content—

*Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run.*

Once more, as I look back upon the work of

Jesus, I find there untiring labour joined with unruffled calm.

There never was a ministry, whether of man or angel, so varied, so intense, or so sustained as was the public ministry of Jesus. He preaches in the synagogue at Nazareth. He preaches on the hill and on the sea. With infinite patience and unexhausted tenderness he trains the Twelve. And all that we know of Him is not a thousandth part of what He said and did. Charged with that mighty task, and with only three short years to work it out, shall we not find Christ anxious? and will we not light on hours of feverish unrest? There is no trace of that. With all its stir, no life is so restful as the life of Jesus. With all its incident and crowding of event, we are amazed at the supreme tranquillity of Christ. There is time for teaching and there is time for healing. There is time for answering and time for prayer. Each hour is full of work and full of peace. No day hands on its debts to to-morrow. Jesus can cry, It is finished, at the close. Here for each worker is the supreme example of untiring labour and unruffled calm.

Let us remember that. It is the very lesson that

we need to-day. There are two dangers that, in these bustling times, beset the busy man. One is, that he be so immersed in multifarious business that all the lights of heaven are blotted out. The calm and quietness that are our heritage as Christians are put to flight in the unceasing round. Life lacks its unity, loses its central plan, becomes a race and not a stately progress, slackens its grasp upon eternal things, till we grow fretful in the constant pressure ; and men who looked to us, as followers of Jesus, for a lesson, find us as worried and anxious as themselves. That is the one extreme : it is the danger of the practical mind. But then there is the other : it is the mystic's danger. It is that, realising the utter need of fellowship with God, a man should neglect the tasks that his time brings him, and should do nothing because there is so much to do. All mysticism tends to that. It is a recoil from an exaggerated service. It is the shutting of the ear to the more clamorous calls, that we may hear more certainly the still small voice.

But all that is noblest in the mystic's temper, and all that is worthiest in the man of deeds, mingled and met in the service of our Lord. Here is the multitude of tasks. Here is the

perfect calm. And that is the very spirit that we need to rebaptize our service of to-day. God in the life means an eternal purpose. And work achieved on the line of an eternal purpose is work without friction and duty without fret. God in the life means everlasting love. And to realise an everlasting love is to experience unutterable peace.

Again, as I look back upon Christ's work, there is another feature of it that strikes me. I find in it a mission for all joined with a message for each.

Times without number we find Jesus surrounded by a multitude. Christ is the centre of many crowds. Wherever He is, the crowd is sure to gather. And how He was stirred, and moved, and filled with compassion for the multitude, all readers of the Gospel story know. Every chord of His human heart was set a-vibrating by a vast assembly. The common life of congregated thousands touched Him, true man, to all his heights and depths. He fed them, taught them. This was His parting charge, 'Go ye into all the world and preach!' Yet for all this—the wide sweep of His mission—no teacher ever worked on so minute a scale as Jesus Christ. Did any crowd ever get deeper teaching than Nicodemus when he came alone? And was the woman of Samaria

despised because companionless? How many sheep did the shepherd go to seek when the ninety and nine were in the fold? How many pieces of silver had gone lost? How many sons came home from the far country before the Father brought out his robes and killed the calf? Christ did not work on the scale of a thousand, or on the scale of ten, but on the scale of one. Companionless men were born, and companionless they must be born again.

Brethren, we must remember that. We cannot afford, in these days, when all the tendency is toward the statistics of the crowd—we cannot afford to despise that great example. It is true, there is a stimulus in numbers. There is an indescribable sympathy that runs like an electric thrill through a great gathering ; and heights of eloquence and song and prayer are sometimes reached where the crowd is, that never could have been reached in solitude. But for all that, all Christlike work is on the scale of one. Jesus insists on quality, not quantity. And when the books are opened and the strange story of the past is read, some voices that the world never heard, as of a mother or a sister or a friend, shall be found liker Christ's than others that have

thrilled thousands by their eloquence. Pray over that sweet prayer of the Moravian liturgy : 'From the desire of being great, good Lord, deliver us.' A word may change a life. It did it for the Philippian jailer. A look may soften a hard heart. It did it for Peter. To sanctify life's trifles, to redeem the opportunities for good the dullest day affords, never to go to rest without some secret effort to bring but a little happiness to some single heart—men who do this, unnoticed through the unnoticed years, grow Christlike ; men who do this shall be amazed to waken *yonder*, and find that they are standing nearer God than preacher or than martyr, if preaching and if martyrdom were all.

Lastly, as I look back upon that life of Christ, I see another feature. I see in it seeming failure joined with signal triumph. If ever there was a life that seemed to have failed, it was the life of Jesus. For a time it had looked as if triumph had been coming. The people had been awoken. The national hope had begun to centre round Him. A little encouragement, and they would have risen in enthusiasm for Messiah. But when Jesus went to His death, all that was changed. The people had deserted Him. His very disciples

had forsaken Him and fled. His hopes were shattered, and His cause was lost. His kingdom had been a splendid dream, and Jesus had been the king of visionaries. Now it was over. The cross and the grave were the last act in the great tragedy. Jesus had bravely tried, and He had failed. Yes ! so it seemed. Perhaps even to the nearest and the dearest so it seemed. God's hand had written failure over the work of Jesus. When lo ! on the third day, the gates of the grave are burst, and Jesus rises. And the Holy Ghost descends on the apostles, and they begin to preach. And the tidings are carried to the isles, and pierce the continents. And a dying world begins to breathe again: and hope comes back, and purity and honour, and pardon and a new power to live, and a new sense of God, and it all sprang from the very moment when they wagged their heads and said, 'He saved others, Himself He cannot save.' Failure? not failure—triumph! It was a seeming failure in the eyes of man, it was a signal triumph in the plans of God.

O heart so haunted by the sense of failure, remember that. O worker on whose best efforts, both to do and be, failure seems stamped to-night, remember that. If I have learned anything from

the sacred story, it is this, that seeming failure is often true success. When John the Baptist lay in his gloomy prison, it must have seemed to him that he had failed. Yet even then, a voice that never erred was calling him the greatest born of women. When Paul lay bound in Rome, did no sense of failure visit him? Yet there, chained to the soldier, he penned these letters that run like the chariots of Christ. God is the judge of failure, and not you. Leave it to Him, and forward. Successes here are often failures yonder, and failures here are sometimes triumphs there.

One of our Scottish ministers and poets has a short piece he names 'A Call to Failure'—

Have I no calls to failure,
Have I no blessings for loss,
Must not the way to the mission
Lie through the path to the Cross?

But one of our English ministers and poets has a short piece that is a call to triumph—

He always wins who sides with God,
No chance to him is lost.

And is the one false, and the other true?
Nay, both are true.

THE DAY OF THE EAST WIND

He stayeth His rough wind in the day of the east wind.
Isa. xxvii. 8.

IT was natural for these Hebrew prophets to fall into the language of poetry. They felt so keenly, they saw so vividly, that their speech grew rhythmical and picturesque. I have heard a poor woman who on the common days had a very backward tongue, and could hardly fit her sentences together—I have heard her under the stroke of God, when the blow fell, and the heart was broken, grow eloquent, persuasive, with something of a passionate music in her tears. And the prophets of Israel became poets so. ‘Ah, Lord God, I am a child and cannot speak,’ said Jeremiah. ‘Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips,’ Isaiah said. But God smote the chord of self that, trembling, passed in music out of sight; and it is that music, with the sound of

a nation's sorrow and struggle in it, that makes this prophecy immortal literature.

I take our text, then, as a poet's thought; and we must try to interpret it, translate it, bring it down to the level of our prose to-night. Translated, then, I read these meanings in it: Firstly, Our trials are timed. Secondly, Our sufferings are measured. Thirdly, Our lives are compensated. God grant us the hearing ear, the understanding heart.

1. So, first, our trials are timed—‘He stayeth His rough wind in the day of the east wind.’ It is something to know the east wind has its day. There is a time to dance, there is a time to mourn. There is a time to be born, there is a time to die. There is a time for the sun to shine, and the birds to sing, and the multitudinous leaves to clap their hands; there is a time for the east wind to blow. To everything under heaven, even the blighting scourge out of the east, there is a time.

In its larger aspects, we are all agreed on that. There are whole classes of trials that have their season as surely as seed-time and harvest have. The man of forty laughs at the sorrows of twelve, but

at twelve, twelve's sorrows are intensely real. In the same way, I fancy, the God of eternity would laugh at the worries of forty, if the God of eternity were not wonderfully kind. Each age has its own trials : God times them so. But you and I have memories so short that we have almost forgotten how the wind whistled yesterday, and fifteen years ago—ah ! it was sunshine then. It is that spirit that aggravates our trials. I must not judge the journey by one mile. I must not reckon the volume by one page. God in the life means order, means succession, means changing discipline for changing years. When I once see that trials have their times, I gain a new stability and peace.

There can be no question that that knowledge was one of the elements in the peace of Jesus. There is nothing amazes me in the life of Jesus more than the magnificent way He breasted all His trials. Was He a fatalist ? Did He only bow the head in dumb submission ? There are a thousand miles between that leaden creed and the free spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. But He recognised God's timeliness of trial. He knew that every hair of the head was numbered. He felt that not one sparrow could be killed but in

the moment of His Father's will. And it was that—that trust in the fitting hour of God—that robed Him in peace as in a vestal garment.

Is that your faith? Is the timing of every trial down in your creed? There is a mother here who once would have said No! With pain, with agony she bore her child. She watched it, prayed for it, laughed with it, loved it, kissed it, till the tendrils of the two hearts were interwoven, and the light of the two lives was one. Then in the fifth year came the east wind, and swept into the cot; till the feet ceased to patter, and the cot was empty, and the coffin was full. And she cried out that God was cruel, and the tender mercy of Jesus was a mockery. It was chance, it was not God, that brought that morning when the east wind blew. But time has gone, and the storm is hushed to-night, and she has glimpses into the glory yonder; and she feels how her whole home is lifted heavenward, and purified by the very gale that nipped it. And she knows it was infinite wisdom after all, that timed the day of the east wind for her.

O brother, God has His time for trial. And not till you need it, not till you can bear it, will

the prison-doors of the east wind swing wide. Your neighbour's burden—it would break your back to-day. But a year flies, and lo, invisible fingers are strapping that very burden on your back, and thanks to God's preparatory work, you are faithful enough, and strong to bear it now. Take no anxious thought about to-morrow. Do not go out to meet your troubles halfway. Till the day of the east wind dawns, it cannot blow. When its morning comes, a sovereign God will summon it. Better enjoy the music while it lasts. Better have eyes for the sun while the sun shines. Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth ! Our trials are timed. Our times are in His hands.

2. But I find another meaning in our poet : he wants to tell us our sufferings are measured. The rough, rude, boisterous gale is on a man. He never could stand the blight of the east wind now. God sees : God knows : God willeth not that any man should perish. If the east wind must blow, the rough wind shall be called home that morning. 'He stayeth His rough wind in the day of the east wind.'

And that is a poet's image of God's tender mercy. It is that text in the gospels set to an old-

world music : 'A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench.' Come from the four winds, O breath ! breathe but a little harshly on that reed ; and it will snap, and never wave its tassels in the sun again. But God is very merciful and piteous, cries 'halt' to the rough wind for the reed's sake, and will not try us more than we can bear.

The Bible is full of instances of that. There is the case of Peter that we had this morning. It was a day of the east wind when Peter fell ; it was a blighting, desolating hour. All that was fairest and best in Peter's past, all that was holiest and highest in Peter's heart, seemed to be shrivelled up and wilted in that great denial. And had the rough wind blown ; had the terrible judgment of an insulted Lord whirled like a lash on Peter's heart, it would have turned his agony into despair. But He stayed His rough wind in the day of the east wind. He turned and looked, and reached through a look the very soul of Peter, and Peter went out, and wept, and lived ; and Peter was saved by being seen !

Or think of Thomas, think of that doubting disciple. For Thomas, too, it was a day of the

east wind when he said, I shall not believe unless I see. How shall Christ treat that doubter? Will He upbraid him? Breathe on him with a blast of angry judgment? 'Come hither, Thomas! See here My hands, My feet, My side.' He stayed His rough wind in the day of the east wind. And the very loving-kindness of it all scattered the doubts of Thomas, and he fell down crying, 'My Lord, my God!'

I happened on Friday night to quote this text to a friend who was sitting by the fire with me, and when I told her what it meant, and how it spoke of the gentle measurings of God, she said, 'Yes, I have often found that true.' And so have you, my brother, so have you, my sister; only sometimes your eyes were holden. I knew a man, he was a rough, strong man, and like most rough men he found the world a rough place. For, somehow, we seem to spin our world out of our heart, and as we are, so is our universe. Well, he was rough, and the world was rough to him. There was jarring, grating, bitterness every day. He had enemies endless, his friends were almost none. There was never a day when he went out, but was a day of the rough wind for him. Then

came the east wind, and a very literal east wind it was for him. It was a chill, it was a setting-in of a decline, it was sad poverty, with one of those brave wives who are life's heroines. And if ever an all-compassionate Father stayed His rough wind in the day of the east wind—if ever God did that, He did it now. What unexpected little acts of kindness! What helps, what letters, what graspings of the hand! Where was the rough wind now? Hushed in the infinite gentleness of God. His friends were like the stars. It took the darkness and the night to bring them out!

3. And has this prophet-poet anything more to teach? One thing, and we shall have it in a word: he wants us to learn our lives are compensated. The east wind blows. Is life worth living to-day? Can there be any compensation for that searching gale? Why, brother, just on account of that east wind, God kept the rough wind in its chains this morning. It is heaven's compensation for the one, that the other shall have no liberty to blow to-day.

And I want you to carry home that simple lesson. I want you to believe God's ways are

equal. We should fret less, we should worry less, we should have sweeter hearts, and far, far kindlier tongues, if we but realised God's compensating hand. You have been dwelling so peevishly on what you haven't, that you see not the possibilities of what you have. You have been crying out bitterly against the east wind ; you have quite forgotten that the rough wind is stayed. You have not genius, but have you common-sense ? You are plain-looking—perhaps that is the secret of that unselfish heart of yours, that has made you such a universal favourite. You have no iron will, no masterful character ; you are impressionable, yielding, almost weak. Quite so, my brother, so is the sea impressionable, yet there are glories unspeakable of light and shadow on it, and a highway for the great navies there. There is not a lad, how ragged and desolate soever, but has his song, his laughter. There is not a sky, however frowning, but somewhere has its patch of blue, its star.

Now, that is the true philosophy of life. With all my heart I commend it to the young men and women here. I take myself on trust. God set my limits, and for my limits God will com-

pensate me. I work on my own lines, I drive to my own goal, under the shadow of the cross of Jesus. I am too busy to snarl. I have too much to do, to halt one moment to minimise my brother. He has his limits ; God knows, so have I. He has his compensations ; thanks to the Highest, I have mine, rich, deep, magnificent. So in true brotherhood and charity, with a smile in the thick of it, with a little music in the worst of it, we shall come at last where the rough wind and the east wind both are hushed, and for ever, and for ever, and for ever, broods the peace of God.

FOREWARNED, FOREARMED

We are not ignorant of his devices.—2 Cor. ii. 11.

THIS is a chapter of autobiography. It is one of the glimpses we get into the great human heart that everywhere throbs in these epistles. Some men's doctrine is so divorced from their life and from their experience, that the two seem separate spheres not to be thought of at the same moment. But it is never so with a really sincere man: and it is never so with Paul. What he believed was so bound up inextricably with what he was, that he can pass from doctrine to his own history, and from his history back again to doctrine, and it all seems quite natural. O why is our life so separated, part from part! Why are there these great gulfs between our Sunday and our Monday, our brain and heart, our doctrine and our practice! All Paul's theology is useless—God may condemn us by it—unless the tides of it sweep into every creek

and inlet of this so broken and mysterious shore.

Well, in this chapter of autobiography our text occurs. ‘We are not ignorant of his devices.’ Do you observe that gracious *we*? Only God’s perfect gentleman would have written that. As a matter of fact, these men of Corinth were ignorant of the devices of the devil. Had they but known them, he never could have spread such havoc in the church as these two letters reveal. An uninspired man, blind to the possibilities in others, would have said *I*. But Paul wrote in the Holy Ghost, and had the outlook and the hope and the magnificent prospects of the Holy Ghost for every man within him. And in the power of that, he elevates these Corinthians to his own level—some day they shall be there—and he says *we*. It is the way of Paul. It is the way of Christ. It is the way of love: expecting great things from the most ignorant man; and by the very sunshine of the expectation, starting the growth of them.

Now I want in a simple way to speak of some of these devices to-night. ‘Knowledge is power,’ said Lord Bacon: and to know some of the subtleties of that malevolent power that fights against us,

is so far to be forearmed. Paul does not tell us what the devices were. But probably the devices of to-day are very much the same as in Paul's time. For underneath all changing years, and the growing complexities of life, this heart keeps wonderfully constant ; and the arts that take it and that snare it *now*, took it and snared and slew it eighteen hundred years ago. We are not ignorant of his devices—what, then, are some of these ?

Firstly : He labels evil things with pleasant names.

There is a tendency in all language to do that. Whether it springs from a very natural desire to hide the uglier sides of human life, or whether it is the survival of some old pagan feeling that tried to propitiate the gods of nature by fair words, we cannot tell. But every language has been rich in what grammarians call euphemisms—these nice and delicate words that cover some offensive truth. Last May Prince George of Greece went over to Crete to become governor. You will remember how, before he went, there had been fierce rioting and bloodshed between the Mussulmans and Christians. And when he went, and was received with great enthusiasm, the correspondent of the

Times gave a very curious description of the scene. 'The long rows of ruined houses, beneath which, in some cases, the fire is still smouldering,' he writes, 'are almost concealed by festoons and banners.' It was an attempt to decorate and hide the tragedies. And language is always doing that. No man has ever loved to call the seamier side of things by its right name, or to look the darker facts of life straight in the face. And from the first, language has been busy in fashioning its own festoons and banners to hide these ugly things. It is this tendency of human speech that is caught up and wrested by the devil into an engine and instrument of ill. If, in the natural shuddering at death, I shrink from saying, 'My mother is dead,' and say instead, 'She is gone,' there is no harm in that. But if, by any trick of speech, I veil the filthiness of sin ; or if I cannot see how odious evil is because I have dubbed it with some pleasant name, I have been ignorant of his devices. Who called the world of self and pleasure the gay world ? Who named the business man whose transactions border on the shady the smart man ? Who said that the toper who is breaking his wife's heart had his little weakness ? Who smiled and said the profligate was only fast ?

or called the sowing of a harvest of misery for children's children the sowing of wild oats? O cease that speech! Call vile things by their vile names, and be not ignorant of his devices.

Secondly: He makes his onset on our strongest side.

Our characters are complex products, and in every one of us strong elements and weak are strangely blended. The strongest Achilles has his defenceless heel. And the worst of us is not altogether bad, the weakest of us not altogether weak. There is something that still rings true; there is some chord that will still make some music in us. Thou hast a worst side, and generally men take thee on thy worst side. But thou hast a best side, and God takes thee on that. And Satan, transforming himself into an angel of light, assails on that side too.

The Bible has many instances of that. Who above all patriarchs and prophets was noted for his meekness? Was it not Moses? Yet it was Moses who brake the tables in a passion, and failed in the grace that most distinguished him. Whom do we call the father of the faithful? Is it not Abraham? Yet the worst sin in

Abraham's life sprang out of want of faith. And patient Job sinned through impatience: and the brave Peter fell through cowardice. And gentle and most tolerant St. John, in that one hour when he would have the fire on the Samaritan villagers, was like to be the most intolerant of all. And did not Christ know this? Christ's loftiest passion was for the kingdoms of the world, that He might bring them into obedience to God. And it was there that the Prince of Darkness struck at him: 'All these things will I give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me.'

O friend, remember that. Where thou art strongest, watch! Where thou art best and bravest, be on thy guard! The choicest gifts that God has dowered you with may be your snare, and all that is best in you may be your ruin. Yon victim of intemperance might have been a happy man to-day but for the kindly heart and splendid fellowship that made him the darling of the social company. It was the best in him that gave a standing-ground for Satan. All that was best in him has proved his curse.

Thirdly: He uses tools.

It is one mark of practical genius to choose the

right instruments to do its work. A born administrator is a man who not only works hard himself, but has the skill of choosing the right men to be his servants. That is always a mark of practical capacity. And a true general shows his genius to command by the way in which he uses each branch of the service—cavalry, artillery, and infantry—for its proper work. Every administrator must make use of agents ; and he displays the greatest genius for administration who picks his agents with the greatest skill.

What a magnificent administrative genius that power must be that plots our ruin, if we judge it by a test like that. Could you conceive a finer choice of instruments than Satan makes, when he is seeking to overthrow a human soul ? Out of a hundred gates into your hearts and mine, he passes by those that are barred, and chooses one that will open at a touch. His is the plan and his the whole device. But he gets other hands and other hearts to do the work ; and the whole history of the tempted world, and the whole story of your tempted heart, tells the consummate genius of the choice.

Think of our Lord's experience. First, in the

wilderness Satan tempted Him. He came himself that time: he sent no messenger and used no agent. It was a personal conflict between the Prince of Darkness and the Prince of Life. But the next time the baffled tempter fell back upon this old device. Next time he does not come in person: he comes incarnated in Simon Peter. What, was it not a master-stroke of genius to reach at the heart of Jesus through the loyal heart of that disciple? And when Jesus turns and detects Satan's voice in Peter's tongue, and cries, 'Get thee behind me, Satan, thou savourest not the things of God,' He was not ignorant of his devices.

And do you think that artifice disused? Has Satan's brain grown blunted in these latter days? It is not the men who hate us, and it is not the men and women we despise, who tempt us most. It is those we trust and those who love us best, who often prove hell's aptest messengers. If we but hated those who tempt us, life would become a very easy thing. It is because we love and reverence them so, that for a thousand men and women life is hard. Come, tempter, in thine own cursed shape, and any coward shall beat thee

off. But come through the loving heart of Simon Peter, and look through the loving eyes of Simon Peter, and speak through the loving lips of Simon Peter—and only Christ can make us strong to say, ‘Get thee behind me, Satan.’

Fourthly : He shams defeat.

To sham defeat is a well-known trick in warfare. Nothing will sooner disorganise a regiment than to see the enemy routed on the field. While the fight rages, a man is nerved and strung, for he is carrying his life in his hand, and knows it. But with the victory there comes reaction, and men grow careless ; and there are battles where the enemy has shammed defeat, just to inspire that careless spirit. O sirs, we are not ignorant of his devices ! *This* old device of sham defeat—have you not seen it ? You fought like a man with your besetting sin, and mastered it. God keep you watchful. God keep you on your guard. One careless hour and the routed sin is at the gates again, and the whole battle has to be fought anew. We thought the sin was dead, and it was only sleeping. We thought that we had slain that habit, and it is stealing over us again. We thought we had defeated Satan, and

Satan only shammed defeat. Keep the loins girded, and the lamps burning, and the hand upon the sword until the end. Our unseen foe is a consummate strategist. Many a soul has been lost because it won—won in the first encounter, then said all's well, and laid its arms aside—till the old sin crept up again and sprang. And the last state was worse than the first.

Fifthly: He lays the emphasis upon to-morrow. We are always prone to put the accent there. It is very hard to grasp the true splendour of the present. To-day seems insignificant ; to-morrow shall be the real day for us. God never speaks that way. God's Bible never speaks that way. It tells us that the present is divine, and lays the whole emphasis upon to-day: 'Now is the accepted time.' And the Holy Ghost is saying, To-day.

And this is the arch-device of the arch-tempter. In every life, for every start and every noble deed, God says, To-day. In every life, for every start and every noble deed, the devil says, To-morrow. Is it conversion? To-day, says God: To-morrow, whispers Satan. Is it the breaking with that sin? To-morrow. Is it the starting on a higher level? To-morrow. To-morrow, to-morrow,

always to-morrow ! till by to-morrow's road we are at Never—and the chance is gone, and the dream has vanished, and the hope is dead. O friends, young men and women, be not ignorant of that device. It will never be easier to come to Christ than now. It will never be easier to make the start than now. God says, To-day, to-night ! And God who says it, is here to give the power that now can save, and now can cleanse, and now can send you home, with old things passed away and all things new in Jesus Christ.

THE MINUTE PHILOSOPHER

Seest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not.—Jer. xlvi. 5.

WE cannot define life; most of our problems concerning it would be ended, if we could. But if we cannot define it, we can interpret it, and *service* is perhaps life's best interpretation. Viewed from a thousand standpoints, life is service. In one sense, there are no masters in the human family. A man must serve, if he would live.

This is no fancy; it is the gospel view. It is one distinguishing mark of the New Testament that it treats life as service: 'By love, serve one another.' 'Ye serve the Lord Christ, the living God.' And Jesus Christ, the pattern and type of perfect manhood, took on Him the form of a servant, and was among men as one who serveth. So we are moving upon gospel lines to-night. All human life is focussed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and He was among men as one who serveth.

To rise in life, then, is never to escape from service. The nobler and better we are growing, the more entangled shall we be in a far-reaching servitude. The folly and crime of selfishness is this, that it wastes upon my one worthless heart the service that should have blessed society. A servant-girl serves one single family, and that is good. A leader of the government signs your humble servant to the whole nation, and that is better. But the aim of Jesus of Nazareth was to be the servant of mankind, and that is best of all. Is He your Master? There never was such a servant as your Master. The man who only cares to serve himself stands on the lowest rung of the ladder of humanity. Jesus has taught us that service is the true measurement of greatness. He is the least whose service is the poorest. He is the greatest whose service is the best. Could we forget ourselves, and serve mankind in life and death, we should be growing Christlike.

In service too, and nowhere else, lies our true liberty. It is one of these paradoxes of which life is full. Here is a man who sees, through the drudgery of every day, a vision of independ-

ence by and by. He toils, and slaves, and serves, and you would be surprised if you could see the bright picture he has painted against the background of the future. Some day he will be independent. Some day, if all goes well, he will say good-bye to drudgery for ever. And generally this dream of independence has been a strange illusion. He would give worlds to have the zest and liberty of service back again. Hence those innumerable services to art, to literature, to philanthropy, rendered by independent and retired men, whose hope had been one day to be rid of service altogether. True freedom is never liberty *from* service. True freedom is always liberty to serve. God frees a man from sickness and from sin and from the curse, only to do *His* will. Christ is the servant, and it is in Christ that we are free.

Now if life be service, how all-important is it for you and me to learn the art of serving well. If life were speaking, we should all study rhetoric. If life were fighting, we should all be skilled in arms. But life is serving, and yet how little we have studied the golden rules of service. Now let me take one golden rule

to-night and press it home. Let me neglect all else and urgently insist upon one law of service. That law is this. The best and richest service you can render is often not the service of great things but of small.

Well, we begin to see the truth of that when we remember how largely our lives are compact of little things. Take any act of yesterday, take any word you spoke, take any thought that flashed across your brain—how insignificant! and yet a thousand insignificances like these made up your yesterday, and a thousand yesterdays make up your life. Even to the greatest, the chance of doing great things rarely comes. To you and me, perhaps never at all. There are some mountain rocks that have been formed by sudden upheavals of the molten earth. But there are others, like the chalk cliffs of Dover, built of countless organisms so minute that the naked eye would fail to see them. And life is like the latter. Great things are of to-morrow. But it was very small things that filled up to-day. And now—to-day—is God's time. He does not ask to-morrow's service yet. Give Him to-day's, and He will be content.

So then, if life be service, and if the bulk of life is made of little things, the service that neglects these lesser elements must fail. The most selfish man among us here can rise to an unselfish service now and then ; and the glow of it will keep his conscience quiet through twenty selfish days. A saint is one who sanctifies life's trifles. To consecrate the commonplace—that is right noble service.

If on our daily course our mind
Be set to hallow all we find,
New treasures still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice.

The trivial round, the common task,
Would furnish all we ought to ask ;
Room to deny ourselves ; a road
To bring us, daily, nearer God.

Or look at the matter in another light. Do you not think that service in the small things is often the hardest service in the world ? Is it not harder to be faithful in immemorial days than in the times of crisis ? Is it not easier to be true when we are sorely tried than in some trivial and unconsidered hour ? Great moments help to make us great. We are inspired for

them. Men see what we are doing, and applaud. We act the great scenes before a cloud of witnesses. And all that stimulates us, and helps to make us strong. But the little services of every day are seen by none. If we omit them, none on earth will blame. And if we do them, none on earth will cheer. And to work on, serve on, love on, unnoticed and unpraised, is perhaps the finest heroism earth can show.

That most virile of all bishops, Bishop Latimer, tells in a sermon a story of St. Anthony. St. Anthony was famed over the world for scourgings and for fastings in the desert. And one day, in the desert, Anthony heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Anthony, thou art not so perfect as a cobbler that dwells at Alexandria.’ And Anthony, hearing that, went off straightway to see this perfect cobbler, and said, ‘Come, tell me, how dost thou spend thy time?’ ‘Sir,’ said the cobbler, ‘as for me, good works have I none. In the morning when I rise, I pray for the whole city where I dwell. And then I get me to my labour, and spend the whole day getting my living. And I keep me from all falsehood, and when I make a promise, I keep it and perform

it truly. And thus I spend my time poorly with my wife and children. And this is the sum of my simple life.' *That* was the Alexandrian cobbler's service, and it was greater than Anthony's, says Latimer.

And Latimer is right. It is easier far to do one striking deed than to be uniformly kind. It is easier any day to be a fasting monk than to be a conscientious cobbler. Many a man has given his body to be burned, who never gave the little services of daily love to wife and children. And many a man in persecuting times has kept the faith, who, when the quiet times came, had never grace enough to keep his temper. I honour every witness, every protester, every martyr. But I do not know whether the unnoticed service in a thousand homes be not as great as theirs. To carry the spirit of Jesus into every day: to bring the love of Jesus to bear on every relationship: to do the commonest drudgery as for Jesus' sake—there is no service loftier than that.

Again mark this, as telling the importance of these little acts. Only through the small services of life faithfully done can you and I be disciplined

for the great services when God is pleased to send them. God measures the service that He will give us to-morrow, not from our talents so much as from the faithfulness with which we serve to-day. You think it was lack of education, lack of influence that held you back? It may have been. But is there not a possibility that it was lack of faithfulness? The strongest barrier to a better to-morrow is a misspent to-day. And faithful service in this so wearisome to-day is the one highway to larger spheres to-morrow. I have known ministers in country parishes who thought themselves too good for a mere handful of poor country folk, and who have spent the precious hours of a first ministry in fretting and worrying for a call. And for the most part, they are just fretting and worrying there yet. And others I have known who counted it the greatest honour of their lives to preach the glorious gospel of the blessed God to the humblest men and women for whom Jesus died. And for the living voice or written word of these, the great Head of the church has rarely failed to make a larger audience. One of the faithfulest workers we ever had in Scotland—

and Scotland always has been rich in them—was Thomas Edward, the naturalist of Banff. And I have heard it locally reported that when, after long years of unrecorded service, they got a public meeting in his honour, and the folk crowded in to welcome him, he turned and whispered to his wife, ‘It’s come at last.’ And if we be truly faithful in the least, it always comes at last. Sooner or later, if thou hast ruled thy one small city well, the God of promises will give thee ten. To dream how we would act in certain circumstances, to think what we would do if things were different, is the sure mark of useless lives. Things are *not* different. The golden opportunity is here and now. It is the service, howsoever humble, of to-day, that carries your future in its arms.

And after all, how can you tell which act is small, which great? These measurements are human, not divine. God’s standard is very different from ours. One look seems a small service. And yet a look broke Peter’s hardening heart. One sentence seems the veriest trifle. And yet one sentence converted the Philippian jailer. If we could tell the ever-widening in-

fluence upon the world of the smallest kindnesses love ever did, I hardly think we should call them small again. If every little thing were truly little, we should not think to find them in the great life of Jesus. Yet Jesus gave a promise to little congregations ; and crowned with praise the widow's little gift ; and took the little children in his arms. If all small services were really small, we should not look for them in Jesus' work. Yet Jesus, with a world to save, went about villages doing good. Viewed from the altitude of heaven, much of our greatness is the veriest trifling, and many a trifle of ours is truly great. It is the motive, it is the spirit, and not the greatness of the consequences, that make things great with God. The smallest act is great if done for Him. The greatest act is small if done for self. Serve, and suspend thy judgment. That God who counts the number of the stars yet binds the broken heart, that God who perfects every cup of moss as finely as the forest oaks, has different estimates of magnitude from you. In the great day, we shall be all surprised at the reversed importance of our deeds. Many that were first shall be last, and the last first.

What the world needs above all else to-day is consecrated character, and that is just what service in small things shows. Great services reveal our possibilities. Small services reveal our consecration. And in the latter, rather than in the former, lies your best hope of influencing the world. Bridge-builders build our bridges seven or eight times stronger than the ordinary traffic needs. And bridges are rarely tested to the utmost. They do their best work carrying the daily loads. Still, if the strain *should* come, the strength is there. So you and I have latent powers and slumbering capacities. And some day, perhaps, all shall be needed. But now—to-day—it is in life's common traffic, and the brave carrying of life's common loads, that we shall serve best, and glorify God in a consecrated life. ‘Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not.’ God brings the glory of the autumn hills out of a million indecipherable heather-bells. God brings the glory of the rainbow out of a million indistinguishable drops. And God can bring the glory of a consecrated character out of that countless multitude of little deeds that form our life.

THE MINISTRY OF SURPRISE

Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness.—Ps. xxi. 3.

THAT word ‘prevent,’ as I dare say we all know, has changed its meaning since this verse was written. When we speak of preventing a man now, we mean that we hinder him or keep him back from something. But in our older English the word had a simpler meaning : it meant to anticipate or go before. Thou goest before him with the blessings of goodness : that is how we should render it to-day. And what a strange commentary it is on human wandering that the word ‘prevent’ should have so changed its meaning. We are so rash, so open to be trapped at every turn, that the kindest service of the man ahead is, nine times out of ten, to hinder us. And so the word that meant once to go before, now means to check, to hinder, to prevent. ‘He goeth before you into Galilee,’ said the angel.

And I should have gone astray a hundred times, if that prevenient Christ had not prevented me.

This, then, is the psalmist's meaning in our text. God's blessings of goodness took him by surprise. There were many things, I doubt not, he had prayed for: prayed for and hoped for, long, earnestly, and sincerely: until at last, after long waiting, came the answer, and in *these* blessings there was no surprise. But David had found, what I think you have found, that the ways of heaven are infinitely diverse; and sometimes, before he ever prayed at all, the blessings of God had lighted in his bosom. It was that ministry of sweet surprise that touched him. And I pray God it may touch us to-night. It is of that element of surprise in the handiwork of God that I want to speak a little.

Of course, in speaking of divine surprises, we are looking at the matter from the side of men. From the side of God, from the altitude of perfect knowledge, there can never be any question of surprise. Did you ever notice what Jesus calls his miracles? He calls them signs and works, but never wonders. It was only His

followers, who looked at His miracles from the other side, who gave the name of wonders to them. It was they who were surprised at them, not Jesus. It was in their eyes, not in the eyes of Christ, that they were wonderful. I take it that miracles were just as natural to Jesus as writing or speaking is to you or me. So with the whole method of divine surprise. It is our finite mind that makes it possible. From the infinite knowledge of God it is excluded. He seeth the end from the beginning.

Now let us trace this feature of surprise through some of the spheres of the handiwork of God. And first I want you to notice it in nature. We talk of the uniformity of nature, and it is wonderful with what a steady march the days and seasons keep their appointed course: ‘While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and heat and cold, and summer and winter, shall not fail.’ Now you would think it would be a dull dead world where everything was so uniform as that. You would think we would grow weary of the earth when we could calculate so on every coming harvest. We grow so utterly tired of everything that has no possibilities of the unexpected in it.

Well, I believe it is that dread monotony that God averts, by His strange and beautiful method of surprise. I may have watched the coming of a score of spring-times ; but when the next spring comes, with its throat of music and its cloak of green, it is all as fresh and wonderful to me as if there had never been a spring before. And the clouds, and the sunsets, and the song of birds, these have been ours since we were little children ; yet they are full of surprises for us still. It is that that makes this earth on which we dwell something far other than a dead machine. It is that that is forgotten by the men who think that the laws of nature will explain everything. The glad surprise of every dawn and May day, in the teeth of iron and inexorable law, speaks, better than a hundred arguments, of the presence of an immanent Creator.

This element of surprise, too, is found in human character. It is not only geniuses that baffle us. In our most commonplace neighbour there is something that in a twinkling upsets our calculations. We thought we knew our neighbour perfectly. We had pigeonholed his character long ago. We had measured his powers by our little

footrule. We understood him thoroughly, so we thought. But suddenly he is faced by opportunity, or a staggering blow falls, or a great crisis comes, and there flash from the man such gleams of heroism, such dauntless resource, such noble fortitude, that our old estimates go by the board at once. There were deeps in him that we had never dreamed of. ‘The fire in the flint shows not till it be struck.’ There were slumbering powers of dogged perseverance we never suspected in the easy days. We all surprise each other now and then : and now and then we all surprise ourselves. You never thought he had it in him? Ah, quite so ! And yet you said you knew him, and you judged him. Judge not, my brother. Best leave that to God. It takes His infinite knowledge to do it well. Some day, under some sudden call, or at the sound of the trumpet stirring him to battle, the man will reveal such unexpected things that your old knowledge of him will look shallow.

This feature of surprise, again, has a large place in God’s providential dealings ; so large that we all know the maxim of a shrewd observer : it is the unexpected that happens. Doubtless that is

a straining of the truth. God does not always overthrow our inferences. But it is so imperative that we be humble, so needful that we recognise the narrow limits of our little wisdom, that times without number the chariot-wheels of God move to their goal by unexpected roads. We read to-night about the call of David. We read of Samuel in the house of Jesse. And when Eliab came—big, brave, and handsome, Eliab the first-born, every inch a king—Samuel was certain this was Saul's successor. But God was as certain Eliab was not—His king was out on the hills with the sheep that morning. Two women shall be grinding at the mill, and the one shall be taken and the other left ; and sometimes God takes the one that everybody thought He would have left, and leaves the one we thought He would have taken. A minister goes home from his pulpit of a night, and he sits down and says, 'I have done well to-day,' and in the judgment of heaven it may have all been failure. And another Sabbath and his heart is sick : no one was listening ; he was dead ; he failed ; and souls will bless God to all eternity that they were touched and kindled by that message. It is God's surprise in provi-

dential dealing. It is the unexpected goings of the king.

But I think it is in the life of Jesus Christ that the method of surprise comes to its crown. God never used that ministry so richly as in the circumstances of the Incarnation. A recent writer, in a book full of insight, has called attention to the surprises of Jesus' teaching. He means that our Lord surprised men into attention by the unexpected issues of His sentences. But it is not only in the teaching of Jesus, it is in everything, from the cradle on to Calvary, that I am met by this method of arrest. Is there no surprise that the cradle was a manger? Is there no surprise that the sinless and stainless Lord should have been the friend of publicans and sinners? Is it not surprising that the King of Life should have been slain by cruel hands upon the cross? O brethren, we do not feel the marvel of it, because it is all familiar in our ears as household words. Did it come new to us, and freshly as the dawn, and find us unsophisticated, childlike, we should begin to marvel at it more.

And did you ever think, that in these sweet

surprises of the life of Christ, there is a kind of proof of His divinity? I say a *kind* of proof, for I am impatient of intellectual arguments to prove things that run deeper than the intellect. But the point is, that in every revelation of the Infinite, I see at work the method of surprise. I trace it in the spring-time and the summer. I see it in the handiwork of Providence. And I could hardly think that Jesus Christ was God's, if I saw nothing of its working there. But it *is* there, variously, richly, that very element that gladdens nature; and it helps me to feel, amid the great mysteries of Incarnation, the hand of the Creator of the world.

Now what do you think are the uses of this ministry? And what are God's purposes for you and me in working by this method of surprise? I think the first use of this ministry of heaven is just to keep alive our sense of wonder; but as I must preach to you some evening on the dying out of wonder and its consequences, we shall not wait to consider that to-night.

But think: is not God's method of surprise also intended to increase our joy? There is not a father or a mother here but has practised that

sweet device with his dear children. What song and merry laughter on the birthday because of the little surprises of the birthday morning ! Had the gifts been expected and counted on and seen, the birthday sun would never shine half so brightly. And 'like as a father pitieith his children, so the Lord pitieith them that fear Him'—and out of the pity of His fatherly heart, He is always eager to increase our joy. Were you never surprised at the sympathy you got when the shadow of trouble fell across the threshold ? Were you never surprised at the friends you had, and you never knew it till the darkness ? Ah sister, it may be that darkness was your spiritual birthday, and the unexpected comradeship and love, and the sweet surprises of considerate hearts, all these have been God's birthday-gifts to you. Without them the cup of gall would have been doubly bitter. God used that ministry to make you glad.

And only to make you glad ? Nay, brother, no ! To make you wakeful, to keep you on the watch, that is the deepest purpose of our God in the unceasing method of surprise. Awake thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give you light !

‘Behold, the bridegroom cometh!’ is the cry.
‘For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.’ And if it come, and find you unprepared, you cannot lay the blame of that on God.

THE WANDERING BIRD

As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place.—Prov. xxvii. 8.

THE Bible is full of lessons from the birds. It tells us there is a message in their song. It finds its commentaries in the hedgerows, and some of its choicest parables among the trees. And I do not think we shall ever know God's word, if we never know the beauties of God's world. It was not only our immortal poet who found tongues in the trees, books in the running brooks. Our immortal Bible found that long ago—‘sermons in stones, and good in everything.’ O, have an open eye this spring-time. ‘There is a book that he who runs may read.’ ‘For the invisible things of *Him* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made. So that they are,’ says the Apostle, ‘without excuse.’

Well, in this commentary of nature upon grace, there is many an illustration from the

birds : 'Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap.' 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and not one of them falls to the ground without your Father?' It is Christ who has given us the eyes to see these winged arguments for God's provision. So here, in the old covenant, the birds are called on to rebuke our restlessness : 'As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place.'

You will note that the whole point of the rebuke lies in the emphasis we put on *wandering*. It is not the flying, it is the wandering bird that reads us a lesson on our discontent. Have you noticed the swallows at the end of summer when the days are shortening and the air is keen? They congregate in flocks high up above us ; and then some morning we wake, and they are gone. They are off to the sunshine and the warmth of Africa. Their haunts are deserted, and their nests are empty. Yet it was not of a flight like *that* the king was thinking when he wrote, 'As a bird that wandereth from her nest.' There is some instinct moving them, we know not what. There is an irresistible impulse to be gone. Voices are calling them we do not hear.

Longings are urging them we do not feel. They do not wander : they are impelled, mysteriously. It is the touch of God that makes them go.

So to all men come times when we must forward. Some vision beckons us, some prospect opens ; and by a spiritual instinct, far deeper than the swallow's, we feel that the moment to advance has come. It came to Abraham in his Chaldean home : 'Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house.' It came to the children of Israel in Egypt. It came to the Son of God, I speak with reverence, when in the fulness of the time, impelled by the passion of a love divine, He left the glory and travelled to the manger. And with ripening powers, and purer views of duty, and growing conceptions of the yoke and of the cross, it comes in differing spheres to all. The Christ-filled life has got its own ambition. The waters of God are not a stagnant pool. But all that earnest pressing forward, seizing new opportunity, taking the cross up—all *that* stands separated as by the poles asunder from the fickle, restless, discontented spirit that is the spirit of the wandering bird.

I sometimes think that the Shunammite woman, of whom we read to-night,¹ must have had this proverb of Solomon's by heart. I sometimes think she must have had it painted over the fire-place of her little cottage. She had been kind to Elisha, you remember; had treated him with a loving hospitality. And Elisha—like the grateful soul of him—was very anxious to recompense the woman. ‘And what can I do for you,’ he asked the Shunammite, ‘shall I speak to the king and get apartments in the palace for you? or shall I speak to the captain of the host, and get a commission in the army for your husband?’ And you remember her answer to the prophet: ‘I dwell among my own people.’ That little cottage was her true environment. And she had the sense to know that she was happy. What mattered her rough hands and slips of grammar, so long as the woman dwelt among her own. Only a fool would dare to call her vulgar when the background of her life was hill and heather. But place her among the fine ladies of the court, and the Shunammite would have been out of place at once. She would have felt inferior every

¹ 2 Kings 8-13.

day, and lost her kind heart, and become bold and loud—as women who feel inferior often do—and all the time she would have been eating her heart out for the cottage, and the garden, and the hills. Thou wert right, Shunammite, to dwell among thine own ! ‘ For as a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a woman that wandereth from her place.’

I wonder, friend, if *you* dwell among your own—spiritually, intellectually, socially ? All things are yours, it is quite true, for you are Christ’s, I trust, and Christ is God’s ; and every life has got invisible outgoings that touch and intertwine with all humanity. But within the larger there are lesser circles, and in the centre of the lesser circles is a *place*. And *there* I have my function and my calling, and out of that I am in constant danger. I often think of the wisdom of the Bible in telling us the tale of David’s sin. Do you remember the season of that tragedy ? I read it was ‘at the time when kings go forth to battle.’ And David was a king, and war was raging, and the place of a true king was at the front. But David tarried at Jerusalem ; and out of his true environment he fell. How can you

hope to be a lively Christian if your chosen companions make a mock of Christ? If all your little circle drive their carriages, you are sure to grow discontented with the car. O brother, keep an open and kindly heart, use this great wide world as not abusing it ; delight yourself in everything and every one ; but I beseech you, dwell among your own. Elsewhere there are always risks, and never promises. ‘For as a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place.’

Sometimes, of course, we do not know our place. I mean, we are almost certain this is not our place, and it is only afterwards we find it was. The prodigal son, when he lived on the farm at home, was quite convinced that that was not *his* place. It was a thousand pities for that brilliant youth to be wasting his talents on that dreary farm. But when the famine came, and the feeding of the swine, and the gnawing and craving of insatiable hunger, he learned—and it was a dear-bought lesson—that the farm had been his true place after all. So when our dear Redeemer hung on Calvary, the whole world said, That is no place for God! And it has taken the centuries

to teach us that the love of God came to its beauty there. It takes a little faith to credit it, that your humble post is your place to-night. You feel that you are capable of better things, and I do not doubt for a moment that you are. But do not fret. And do not grow dissatisfied. And do not waste one of the golden moments in thinking what you would do if things were different. Act ! and accept thy cross ! Be silently, doggedly, faithful where you are ! It is not the place that makes the man : it is the man and his heart who make the place.

I have two thoughts to give you as we close. The first is, that as a bird that *never* wanders from her nest, so Jesus never wandered from His place. I have an idea, that when we get to glory, we shall find that this proverb was once used by Mary. It was used by her when Jesus was twelve years old, and they had lost Him returning from Jerusalem. Where had He wandered to? that was the question. The child was lost, and the mother's heart was breaking. And then they searched the city for the boy, and found Him in the Temple with the doctors. And 'O son,' said Mary, 'Why did you disobey us?' And don't

you remember what we read in Nazareth, ‘As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place?’ And Jesus answered, ‘How it is that ye sought me: wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?’ There, in the Temple, He was in His place—though it was hidden from his mother’s heart. And from His appointed place Christ never wandered, though He was tempted in all points like as we are. The devil showed Him the kingdoms of the world; but He still went about the villages doing good. And Peter cried, ‘Far be it from thee, Lord!’ but the Lord went on to Calvary for all that. Through sun and tempest, through censure and through praise, in youth and manhood, in agony and death, Jesus was true to His redeeming work. As a bird—a bird of paradise, let me say—as a bird that never wandereth from her nest, so Jesus never wandered from His place.

And here is our last thought—God grant it rest with us—the true place of our deepest life is God. It is not *self*—we are growing tired of self. It is not the *world*—we can embrace the world; and ever, for the spirit, there is a beyond.

It is when the roots of my being run down to the divine ; it is when, beneath all other facts for me, there lies the great fact of a living, moving God ; it is when my life is hid with Christ in God, that my wandering spirit is in its proper place. Are you at home with God ? that is the question. Do you feel that, through the merits of the sacrifice, the everlasting arms are underneath you ? There is peace in it ; there is quiet power in it ; and there is no true peace or power till I am there. God, after all, is my one resting-place. And 'as a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place.'

THE LARGER HOSPITALITY

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.—Heb. xiii. 2.

HERE is a plea for hospitality; it is a strong appeal to these somewhat laggard Hebrews not to be backward in this social grace. Now I want you to observe where it comes in: ‘Let brotherly love continue,’ that is verse *one*; ‘Be not forgetful to entertain strangers,’ that is verse *two*. First brothers and then strangers—that is God’s order, and that is reason’s order; we have to see to it that it is yours and mine. We are so apt to give our best to strangers, and keep our worst for those at home. We are such entertaining company at every fireside but our own. Set your own house in order, brother. Let brotherliness begin again to-night. Then, with that compass-foot fast fixed, swing out the other as widely as you will.

Reading this verse for the first time, it almost

seems as if this plea for hospitality were based upon a selfish motive. Had we but read, 'Be hospitable, for every stranger bears God's image,' we could have understood it. Or had it run, 'See that you entertain the stranger, for has not God been entertaining you right royally since ever you were born in this strange world?' that too we could have grasped. But that is not the motive given. It is, 'for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.' And that seems selfish. Are we to do good that we may win good? Are we to give that we may get? Not so. If a man be hospitable on the bare chance of entertaining angels, he is no hospitable man. But if a man be hospitable from loftiest motives, sooner or later God will bring angels to his door. It is an unworthy thing trying to be holy just in order that you may be happy. Yet, if with nobler ends you aim at holiness, happiness will come. It is a mean thing to be hospitable in the vague hope of having angel's company. Yet be thou hospitable with a larger soul, and angel visitants will reach thee yet. That is our text. It tells the joy of every open home and heart and mind. It reads the doom of every

closed door. Shut it and bar it! You will shut out a hundred vagabonds. One day you will shut out an angel. And it were better to be deceived a score of times than miss a heavenly messenger like that.

I want to take this thought and run it out into three realms to-night. And first, the realm of home.

As the Jew read these words, we know the home he saw. In an instant his mind went back to Mamre, and there, in his tent-door at noon-day, he saw the form of father Abraham again. Three travellers are stepping to the tent. What will the old man do? The sun is vertical; the heat lies shimmering on the downs, and he is tired. He has been tricked a score of times by Hittite tramps; these, not uncharitably, are three more of the brotherhood. Let them pass on—is Abraham's nap to be disturbed by every mendicant? Ah yes, by every one. He never thought of angels; he only acted like the soul of hospitality that he was. Let them be beggars, they shall be entertained. Yesterday's three *were* beggars. To-day the dusty travellers shall prove divine. They were all angels—one the Son of

God—heralds of joy, harbingers of the promise. And Abraham felt it had been well worth while troubling with the unworthy folk, just to get one such visit at the last. In unrecorded days he had been not forgetful to entertain the stranger, and the hour struck when he entertained angels unawares.

Are all the angels dead? Have none in the garb of strangers ever appeared on your horizon? To answer that, we have to ask, What is an angel? Is it some form of radiant wings and spotless dress? These are but trappings—symbols of swift and spotless ministry. An angel is a messenger from God. And every word that ever cheered you from a stranger's lips, and every thought that ever reached you from a stranger's heart, and every Christlike sight that ever touched you in a stranger's home, these have been angel ministries to you—the messengers of God—as truly as were the three to Abraham.

There is not a man here to-night but owes far more to strangers than he thinks. Life's ministries are not exhausted when you have told the ministries of home and friendship. When all the faces are familiar, it is not easy to keep life

fresh. When every voice has an accustomed ring, and every form is known, year in year out, life tends to become stagnant like a pool. Then, oftentimes, under the guise of strangers, God sends into our life some messenger divine. And by a deed, a word, a look, currents begin to flow, and hopes like stars to rise again. We have been entertaining angels unawares, and they have left something of heaven in our hearts and homes.

Round by the North Sea coast, the cold sea, beating for centuries upon the barren shore, has hollowed out great caves, and carved the cliffs into gigantic towers. It is the ceaseless beating of the familiar waves that has done that. But in some districts every cave is green and every cliff is beautiful with fern. And when the trained eye sees that, it knows that some other power has been at work. From far-off strands the great Gulf Stream has come, pouring its warmer tides. And it is that, that like an angel unawares, entertained gladly by our colder seas, has brought the life and beauty to our shores. So many a life, formed by the ceaseless influence of home and friend, springs into unsuspected beauty at

a stranger's touch. Be not forgetful, then, to entertain the strangers. It is worth while opening up speech with fifty men, though only one in all the fifty give us a germ of truth. And it is well to give our sympathy to all, though nine times out of ten it be rejected. God is content that His million drops of rain should fall upon a million stones, if only one drop here and there shall reach a seed. Earth entertains ten thousand rotting husks, and grumbles not, for one may be an oak. Entertain strangers. It is the noblest hospitality. Sooner or later you shall find, by the tokens of a larger heart and fuller life, that you have been entertaining angels unawares.

So far of the realm of home. Now look at the realm of experience a moment. Sometimes we say about a man that he has had strange experiences. We mean by that that he has had a stirring life. Fighting, or travelling, mingling with many men in many lands, he has experienced much that you and I have never known.

But there is a deeper sense in which we all have strange experiences. No life is wholly uneventful. Lay all your plans, shape all your

days as in days past—suddenly, out of the great unknown, steps some event, and in a twinkling every plan is marred. For years life is one uneventful drudgery: we wake, we eat, we work, we tire, we sleep. But the day comes when at our doors there stands a stranger. Perhaps it is poverty—the house has failed. Perhaps it is sickness—what means that pain, that blood? Perhaps it is death. Out of the vast of the Almighty's plan it has been stepping towards us long. We were so blind, sunning ourselves at the tent door, we never saw it. But it has come; it knocks as with the knock of God. How will you treat that stranger? that is the question.

Some men rebel. Some steel their hearts, and cherish angry thoughts of God, and curse the day when they were born. Pharaoh did that. God sent each plague, a heavenly messenger, into the ordered pomp of the Egyptian court. And Pharaoh steeled his heart, and gave the messenger defiance, till his first-born lay dead. And some grow bitter. They think they have been wronged; they think it cruel of God to treat them so. And some despair; but they are brave, and plod along

without a prayer, without a hope, till men say, 'See how resigned they are!' They do not know it is the resignation of a broken heart.

Brethren, there is a nobler way. Be not forgetful to entertain the stranger: you shall be entertaining angels unawares. God's blessings come in strange disguises. Open thy heart; that hated stranger is divine. Is thy small plan to be the measure of God's love? Art thou the only judge in all the universe of good and evil? Rarely along the line of our ambitions, oftener along the line of what we suffer, God calls us to our greatest work.

One of the saintliest ministers in our Free Church once told me the story of his sanctification. They had a child, an only child, and God was pleased to let it sicken till it was near to death. There was no hope; and the father's and the mother's hearts rebelled, and they cried that this was hard. But only for a little. Their trust in God was in eclipse, not quenched. 'Wife,' said the husband, 'we must not let God *take* our child. We must *give* him.' So, kneeling down beside the bed together, they humbly gave to God again what He had lent

them for a little space. Death came, a stranger to that home, and knocked. At first they barred the gate, then entertained him. And in the fragrance of two consecrated lives, never a man or child in all their parish but knows they entertained an angel unawares.

Lastly, I want to take our text into the realm of thought. ‘Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.’

It is amazing what cold entertainment the world has always given to great thoughts, when first they came as strangers. You would have thought men would have welcomed any additions to their store; all history declares it is not so. Every new thought of God, every new thought of man, every new thought of sun or moon or stars, has had to knock for years, sometimes for centuries, before the world opened her gates and let it in.

But do not quarrel with the world. Perhaps that same inhospitality is yours and mine—if not to-day, to-morrow. As life advances, men get familiar thoughts just as they get familiar friends. Life crystallises. Like our set times for meals

and work, we get our set ways of looking at the world. And when new thoughts come, and new interpretations, we lock the strangers out. The house is full ; and the great world rolls on, and we stand still. And then our sons complain we do not understand them ; we are behind the times—and they are right. I do not say it is a bad thing to be old-fashioned. I only plead for the open mind, for the receptive heart, until the end. A man may be in liveliest antagonism to the whole spirit of his age, yet clearly show that he has entertained that spirit, and understands it thoroughly. That is the point. How canst thou tell what angel thoughts thou hast repelled because thy mind is barred these past ten years to all comers ? ‘Prove all things ; hold fast that which is good,’ that is the Christian attitude. By a strange irony, we mean an atheist when we say freethinker. But if the truth alone can make us free, the true freethinker is the Christian.

One word and I am done. It may be there are some here to-night to whom, during this service, there has come some new thought in a stranger’s garb. You entered here quite careless, worldly. But even here some thought of sin, or

of Christ, or of the life in God, has laid its finger on the latch. It may be that on this ordinary Sunday, and at this ordinary service, you are face to face with the crisis of your life. Open the gates ; take in that thought ; give it the entertainment of your heart, and old things will pass away for you, and all things become new. Repel it ; drive it away ; bid it begone—and you go out into the street a little worse, a little farther off from liberty and God. Do not delay to entertain the stranger ! It is your glorious opportunity to entertain no angel, but the angel's Lord : 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me.'

CREATION'S WITNESS TO THE YOUTH OF JESUS

Thou hast the dew of thy youth.—Ps. cx. 3.

WE shall this evening take a poet's licence with these poetic words. We shall apply them, without any prelude, to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, there are two expressions in our text to which I ask attention, and the first of these is *youth*: 'Thou hast the dew of thy youth.' They say that in heaven the saints are always young. No weariness of age can enter there. It is eternal morning around the throne of God. And if that be so, and I do not think it is a dream, it is because, on the face of every saint, there is reflected the light of Jesus Christ, and the light of Jesus is the light of youth. Christ is for ever young. He is eternally the morning star. And that is the first thought our text suggests. It is the everlasting youth of Jesus.

But there is another keyword in our text, and that is *dew* : ‘Thou hast the dew of thy youth.’ And the thought of dew recalls us from the heavens, and spreads before us this earth on which we dwell. There is no dew in heaven. For in heaven there is no night, no change of heat and cold, no need of the sun to lighten them by day. It is this world which is the realm of dew. It is here that the miracle of dew is wrought, where every blade of grass upon the summer mornings sparkles and glances as if bedecked with diamonds. To think of dew, then, is to think of nature. And this is the second leading of our text that guides us to the wonders of creation.

And now, in this opening summer-time, when the world without is so beautiful and fresh that the dullest heart is praising God for it, we shall try and link together these two suggestions. On the one hand we have the eternal youth of Christ, and for us who are Christians, Christ is the Creator. On the other hand we have this great creation, the handiwork of this eternal youth. Let us combine the two. Let us endeavour to run them into line. Let us try and discover the witness of creation to the perpetual youth of Jesus Christ.

First, then, I note that youth is the season of abounding energy. One characteristic mark of youth is physical energy. There is an eager strenuousness in opening life, that is tamed or tempered by the advance of years. As life progresses, we rise to better things. There is a clearer vision and a steadier thought. But when the summits of middle life are breasted, and the feet are travelling downwards on the slope, the tumultuous rush of bodily life that made it once a joy to be alive, is shrined with the other memories of the past. I do not mean that every young man is energetic. For sometimes some hereditary taint, and sometimes sickness, and oftener ill-regulated passions, rob opening manhood of its noble heritage. I only mean that in the plan of God, and in the normal development of human life, youth is the season of abounding energy.

And our common language witnesses to that. For I have known old men whose hair was silvered, and who had passed the threescore years and ten, who were still masters of an amazing energy. And no one says of them, 'It is the energy of age,' but we say, 'It is wonderful that even in age they should retain the energy of

youth.' So, all unconsciously, our common speech bears witness that youth and energy are linked together. And I cannot watch the romping of my child, who never walks if it is possible to gallop, but I learn again, in simple lesson, that abounding energy is a mark of youth.

Well, now, I pass from little things to great. I look abroad upon creation. And I am amazed at once by the tremendous energies with which this universe of ours is full. I watch the motion of the tides ; I hear the roaring of the breakers ; I mark the sweep of rivers ; I am told of the resistless progress of the glacier. This solid earth is whirling round the sun, and the whole system, of which the sun is centre, like a great bird is flying into space. And I cannot think of these resistless powers, and I cannot dwell on that tremendous speed, but I feel that the stamp of energy is on creation. Nor is that energy confined to what is great. It is as wonderful in what is small. For the breeze will waft the tiniest seed, and plant it in the fissure of the rock ; and the seed will germinate, and the rock will crack and rend asunder before the resistless energy of life.

Now as I see these energies of nature, I feel that the heart that fashioned it was young. There is no sign of age about creation. There is no trace of the weariness of years. It is inspired with an abounding energy that tells me of a fresh and youthful mind. Christ may have lived from everlasting ages before the moment of creation came; but the eternal morning was still upon his brow when he conceived and bodied out the world. There are the powers of youth in it. There are the energies of opening life. 'Thou hast the dew of thy youth.'

Once more, youth is the season of romance.

It is in youth, if ever, that the sky is golden. It is in youth the sward is velvet and the flowers are fragrant. It is in youth, if ever, that every dream is sweet, and every sound is melody. As men grow older, life's highways become dustier. A greyer sky succeeds the golden morning. Thorns prick the hand and sometimes pierce the heart. And the world's voices, that seemed like music once, are strangely harsh and discordant now.

Not that life grows poorer as it advances. Not that life ceases to be noble, when the charm

of its opening years is passed away. If I were sent here only to enjoy, the dying out of the romance of youth were terrible. But God had far higher ends in view than that, when we were so fearfully and wonderfully made. We are sent here to learn. We are sent here as boys are sent to school. Our threescore years and ten are God's six standards and His college course. And it is not in the bright romance of youth that we learn the best and most abiding lessons. It is in the dogged doing of our duty, the quiet acceptance of our limitations, the patient carrying of our daily burden, and the stretching out to our brother of a helping hand. These, and not leisure, are life's true opportunities for culture. These are the roots of ethical nobility. And these, thank God, come faster with the hurrying years. Still, it is true that youth is the season of romance. In other words, life's time of light and time of colour comes not in age but youth.

Well, now, I lift my eyes into the face of nature, and the splendour of light and the wealth of colour there amaze me. If the heart that created had been weary with its years, and the creating hand had been outworn, I feel that the world

would have been draped in monotone—and sea and earth and herb and cloud would have known no rich variety of colour. But the whole of nature is flooded with light. And the colourings of the wide world are unsurpassable. And I cannot mark the differing green on every forest tree, and I cannot examine the exquisite adornment of the tiniest flower, and I cannot watch the play of light and shade upon the sea, nor the magnificent splendours of the setting sun, but I feel that this is the romance of youth. That light and colour is not the work of age, it is the outpouring of a youthful heart. It speaks to me of the perpetual youth of Jesus. ‘Thou hast the dew of thy youth.’

But again, youth is the season of vast designs.

To youth there is nothing impossible. When we are young, it seems an easy thing to regenerate the world. We feel a healthy scorn for the small achievements of our ancestors. There is a splendid sweep in the designs of youth. As in the glowing heat the hardest metals are melted, so in the glow of youth the problems that have baffled ages are resolved. And the assurance and arrogance of youth, that irritate

the foolish, and make the wise man smile, are but the tag-ends of these vast designs God loves to see in a young man's brains. Few lads, I fancy, but have felt a quiet contempt for their father's abilities and their father's position. It seems a mean thing to think of ending life as one of a terrace, or an unknown citizen of villadom. But as we grow we learn our limitations, and we match ourselves with stronger and with subtler men, and a new respect is born in us for what others have done, and we come to appreciate the honest work and character that have gone to the building of very humble homes. So vision goes, and duty comes. We become thankful to get even a little done. But even that little we should never have done, but for the vast designs we had in youth. It needs the ideal, says the poet, to brush a hair's-breadth off the dust of the actual. I may miss the target at a thousand yards, but I shall shoot farther than if my range were fifty. Spite of the failure of the after-years, we shall thank God for the vast designs of youth.

Now we live in a world of vast design. Its *distances* are vast. There are stars so remote

that their light set out to travel to us when Jacob lay asleep at Bethel, and it shall only reach our earth to-night. Its *times* are vast. For with creation, as with creation's God, a thousand years are as a single day. Indeed, when I hear that this world of ours has taken millions of years to fashion instead of the thousands that we once believed, it is to me but another hint of the perpetual youth of the creating heart; for the thoughts of youth are long long thoughts. This vastness, then, of space and time, that are inwrought into the design of the creation, are eloquent of youth. And as I dwell on that, I turn to Christ and say, 'Thou hast the dew of thy youth.'

Lastly, youth is the time of hope.

I remember once preaching upon that text in Romans, 'Experience worketh hope.' And a good woman at the close came round and said, 'Ah, sir, that text may be in the Bible, but it is not true; for I have had sore experience of life, and the little hope I ever had is gone.'

And she was right, and the Bible was right too. For it is the experience of Christ that worketh hope, and not the experience of life. I was talking to one of our city doctors this last week—

and a doctor soon learns the secrets of the household—and he told me that one of the hardest tasks for him was to keep up his hopes in human nature. And how a Christless man could live in Dundee for twenty years—I say live, not exist—and still be hopeful, I confess I almost fail to understand. Outside of Christ, experience tends to pessimism. It was so in the world when Jesus came. It is so still.

But youth is still the time of hope. There is a royal hopefulness in youth that is magnificent. And I must be blind indeed, if in the world around me, I have found no traces of that youthful spirit. In every spring there is the hope of summer. In every summer there is the hope of harvest. In every winter, when the fields are bleak, and the cold gust goes whistling in the trees, there lies the hope that the flowers will spring again. And there is not a sparrow on the housetops, and not a cony in the rocks, but is most literally saved by hope. I catch the spirit of perpetual youth in that. It seems to me the world's reflection of the perpetual youth within the heart of Jesus. And I cry with David: 'Thou hast the dew of thy youth.'

So as we go out into the summer world, we

shall take with us that thought of its Creator. And a thousand instances we cannot touch on here, will show us the true handiwork of youth in nature. And when we worship in the temple not made with hands, and when we view the energy that reared the wondrous palace, and the light and colouring that make it radiant, and the vast design of its conception, and the spirit of hope that breathes in all its lines, we shall rejoice in the eternal youth of Jesus. And we will remember that the Creator is our portion, and that He gives eternal life and eternal youth to us. For from the hour of the grave and through eternity we shall be young, and bid defiance to weariness and death, if we are living in the morning light of the eternal youth of Jesus Christ.

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